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III

الرؤيـــة: أن تكون مجلة علمية تتميز بنشر البحوث العلمية الاصيلة التي تخدم أهداف التنمية الشاملة للإنسانية، من خلال البحث العلمي الأصيل، وأن تسهم في تنمية القدرات البحثية لأعضاء هيئة التدريس الأكاديميين والباحثين عربياً وعالمياً.

الرسالة: تفعيل دور البحث العلمي في رفع مستوى الأداء البحثي للباحثين بما يخدم أهداف الإنسانية، ويحقق أهداف التنمية المنشودة، ويزيد من التفاعل البناء مع مؤسسات المجتمع الإقليمي والعالمي.

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المحتويات

الأهداف والرسالة.....

هيئة التحرير لمجلة العالم العربي للعلوم الإنسانية والاجتماعية .....

الأبحاث .....

تأثير التقييم اللغوي على مهارات الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية: أثر التقييم اللغوي على التعليم والتعلم (English) **124–144**

حبيب فضّال أحمد خشم

التحقق من الأخطاء الإملائية التي يرتكبها الطلاب في قسم اللغات الأجنبية بكلية الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية بجامعة الباحة (English) **145–163**

عبد الجليل عبد الله صالح

أدوار الجنس البشري وأزمة الهوية في شعر الشاعرة الأمريكية المعاصرة آن سيكستون (English) **164–191**

مجاهد احمد الوقع

شخصيات أدبية سعودية من ذهب: معجب الزهراني، قراءات في إسهاماته **192–209**

يحيى صالح دحامي

مَجَلَّةُ العالَمِ العَرَبِيّ لِلعُلومِ الإِنسَانِيَّةِ وَالاجتِماعِيَّةِ

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Washback in English Language Writing Skills: The Impact of Language Assessment on Teaching and Learning

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Abstract

This study investigates *washback* phenomenon —the influence of language assessments on teaching and learning—with a focus on English as a second language (L2) writing instruction. Recognizing classroom assessment as a critical pedagogical tool, the research investigates how testing practices shape instructional strategies, curriculum design, and learner behavior, and evaluates both positive and negative effects. Drawing on recent scholarship, the study highlights the effects of washback: it can foster constructive learning outcomes or hinder progress depending on assessment design. The study addresses three central questions: (1) which classroom assessment strategies effectively enhance writing proficiency? (2) How assessments exert on overall language development? (3) What impact do they exert on learners? Quantitative data were collected from 27 students enrolled in an English language skills course at Al-Baha University through standardized test scores, structure surveys, rubric-based evaluations, and statistical analyses of writing performance. Findings reveal that assessments significantly shape writing instruction. While essential assessments for measuring progress, poorly designed tests risk impeding learning. However, performance-based assessments promote skill development and learner autonomy through self-assessment. The study concludes that language assessments yield both positive and negative outcomes, recommending future research to prioritize assessment practices that cultivate critical thinking, creativity, and authentic writing competencies.

Keywords: Washback, writing skills, classroom assessment, language assessment, performance test.

تأثير التقييم اللغوي على مهارات الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية: أثر التقييم اللغوي على التعليم والتعلم

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الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة ظاهرة الأثر الإرتدادي (Washback)، أي تأثير اختبارات اللغة على عمليتي التعليم والتعلّم، مع التركيز على تعليم الكتابة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية (L2). وتُعدَ التقييمات الصّفية أداة تربوية أساسية، حيث يوجّه استراتيجيات التدريس ويؤثر في تصميم المناهج وتفاعل المتعلمين. تهدف الدراسة إلى تقييم الآثار الإيجابية والسلبية للأثر الأرتدادي، مستندةً إلى الأدبيات الحديثة لتوضيح انعكاساته التربوية واقتراح أساليب لتحسين التعليم القائم على التقييم. وتتناول الدراسة ثلاثة أسئلة رئيسية: (1) ما الاستراتيجيات الصفّية الأكثر فاعلية في تعزيز مهارات الكتابة؟ (2) كيف تؤثر التقييمات في تطور اللغة بشكل عام؟ (3) ما أثرها على التطور اللغوي؟

جُمعت البيانات الكمية من 27 طالباً مسجّلين في مقرر مهارات اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة الباحة، باستخدام نتائج الاختبارات المعيارية، والاستبانات المنظمة، وتقييمات الكتابة وفق معايير محددة. أظهرات النتائج أن الأثر الارتدادي له تأثيراً عميقاً في الكتابة. فبينما تُعد التقييمات ضرورية لقياس التقدّم، فأن تصميمها غير الملائم قد يعيق التعلّم. في المقابل، أثبتت التقييمات القائمة على الأداء فعاليتها في تطوير مهارات الكتابة وتشجع المتعلمين عبر التقييم الذاتي. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن تقييم اللغة يفضي إلى نتائج إيجابية أو سلبية، وتوصي البحوث المستقبلية على تصميم تقييمية تُنمّي التفكير النقدي والابداع والكتابة الأصلية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأثر الإرتدادي، مهارات الكتابة، التقييمات الصفية، اختبارات اللغة، اختبار

Introduction

Language assessment plays a pivotal role in shaping educational practices. In English language teaching (ELT), particularly writing instruction, assessments often dictate what is taught and how it is taught. This phenomenon, known as *washback*, refers to the impact that tests have on teaching and learning (Hughes 1989, Alderson & Wall 1996, and Brown 2004). Washback can be either positive or negative regarding its beneficial or detrimental impact on educational practices (Hughes, 1989). In this study, we investigate the impact of assessment on teaching with reference to the skills of writing. Language assessment appears to be a simple process of writing test (Carol A. Chapelle and Geoff Brindley, 2010). Conceptualizing factors that affect language assessment are test methods that to say examinee's language performance, examinee's language capacity of interest is behind the choice concerning what performance should be elicited, and examinee's language performance is scored (Norbert Schmitt, 2010:248).

Assessment plays a crucial role in shaping how writing skills are taught, refined, and internalized by learners. It guides instructional decisions: formative assessments (like drafts, peer reviews, and writing journals) help teachers identify students' strengths and weaknesses. This allows educators to tailor lessons to address specific gaps –whether it's grammar, coherence, or idea development (Buragohain D., 2018). Performance-based assessments give students the chance to demonstrate real writing ability, not just answer grammar questions (Suastra M. and Menggo S., 2020). Studies demonstrate that these assessments boost motivation, self-esteem, and engagement. One study found post-assessment writing scores improved significantly, with students reporting increased confidence and interest in writing (Sastra M. and Menggo S., 2020). Assessment encourages students to reflect on feedback and revise their work, which is essential for developing writing proficiency. It transforms writing from a one-short task into a process of drafting, revising, and refining ideas (Buragohain D., 2018).

The quality of the performance in a relevant way is the assumption which the examinee's score is related to the examinee's capacities that the test was intended to measure (Norbert Schmitt, 2010:248). The test score is used for some purpose, typically for making a decision about the examinee; also, it allows examinees to make decisions about their own subsequent study or to classify participants for research on second language acquisition (Norbert Schmitt, 2010:248). The complex view of language assessment grasps the fundamentals underpinning the process of language assessment. In the construct of language ability, language proficiency makes it seem simple and easily defined. Language testing researchers need to be precise about what a test is intended to measure, and so they develop the

conceptual apparatus to do so (Norbert Schmitt, 2010:249). Construct is what influences the test developers' choice of the testing method, the intended meaning of the test scores, and the appropriateness of the test use.

In reference to those mentioned above, the researcher attempted to analyze and disclose performance assessment effects on paragraph writing ability. The present study focuses on a variety of classroom assessment strategies on writing proficiency while addressing the parameters of writing rubrics, and impact by means of investigating the following research questions:

- RQ1: What are the new classroom assessment strategies to be used effectively to improving writing skills?
- RQ2: How can these assessments enable L2 learners to interact and engage in English language learning and teaching?
- RQ3: What impact can these assessments have in changing L2 learners' English language?

Literature Review

The concept of washback was popularized by Alderson and Wall (1993), who argued that tests influence teaching and learning behaviors. Studies have shown that high-stakes writing assessments often lead teachers to "teach to the test," focusing on test formats rather than communicative competence. Washback is a term commonly used by writers on language assessment to denote the influence of testing on teaching (Chapelle C.A., and Brindley G. 2010; Hughes 2013). The concept of *washback* refers to the influence that testing exerts on teaching and learning (Hughes 1989, Alderson & Wall 1996, and Brown 2004). In the context of writing skills, this effect can be both positive and negative depending on how assessments are designed and implemented. Generally, washback can be divided into positive and negative one regarding its beneficial or detrimental impact on educational practices (Hughes, 1989).

The construct is defined by an ability approach as an unobservable trait. And performance approach which aims to make inference more 'directly' from test performance to performance outside the test setting (Norbert Schmitt, 2010:250). A performance test is the actual performance of relevant tasks are required of candidates, rather than more abstract demonstration of knowledge, such as that required by tests of ability (McNamara, 1996: 6). Test used to measure writing and speaking are often referred to as 'Performance test' Norbert Schmitt, 2010:250).

When assessments are thoughtfully aligned with learning goals, washback becomes positive. Positive washback refers to the way that teachers and students are encourage to achieve their teaching and learning objectives (Alderson & Wall, 1993). So, assessments can enhance writing instruction by encouraging process-oriented teaching, promoting authentic writing tasks, improving student motivation, and fostering critical thinking (Spratt, 2005 , Cheng 1997, Weigle & Jensen, 1997).

Washback can significantly influence various aspect of teaching and learning process, namely curriculum, materials, teaching methods, feelings and attitudes, and learning (Spratt, 2005). Examination has provable impacts on the content of language lessons because teachers tend to narrow the curriculum to the areas which commonly tested (Alderson & Wall, 1993). The parts of the exam which are already taught likely carry the most marks (Lam, 1994, as cited by Spratt, 2005). Negative washback: teachers have a tendency to focus narrowly on the domain directly related to the exam (Vernon, 1956). Examination affects the time allocation in the curriculum (Smith, 1991).

When the exam comes, the past papers and the exam-related textbooks are at the greatest use (Anderson & Wall, 1993). Teachers rely on using these materials heavily because "they believe the best way to prepare students for exam is by doing past papers" (Lam, 1994, as sited by Spratt, 2005). Teaching methods and learners' approaches to learning are driven by testing (Frederiksen, 1984; Frederiksen & Collins, 1989). Most teachers tend to alter their teaching methods to meet the demand of the test (Buck, 1988). With the influences of examination, instructors tend to teach through the exam tasks or hold the activities to develop exam skills or strategy (Alderson and Hamp Lyons, 1996; Shohamy, 1996, and Watanabe, 1996).

Tests can affect teachers' and learners' feelings, attitudes because they are often administered at the end of the course (Pearson, 1988). For learners, the exam can make them worry about an inaccurate reflection of all aspects of their studies (Cheng, 1997). For teachers, they feel under pressure when the exam gets closer because of the anxiety of students' results or unfamiliar test format (Cheng, 1998, as cited by Spratt, 2005). In positive washback test, learners can get encouraged and motivated to attain learning and teaching objectives (Anderson & Wall, 1993).

Writing skills are essential in both personal and professional spheres to meet the demands of the twenty-first century. For instance, writing is the basis for developing key skills like reading, listening, and speaking (Biju, N. et al. 2024;). Additionally, consistent writing practice can boost learners' imagination, creativity, and problem-solving abilities, as each writing exercise involves a constructive

cycle of ideation, composition, and decision making (Fajriah, 2023; Kara & Abdulrahman, 2022). However, many students still struggle to meet the writing proficiency expected by universities and employers (Stewart, Wall, and Marciniec 2016). This challenge is even more pronounced for second language (L2) learners, who often face additional difficulties in developing their writing skills due to language barriers (Safari F. and Ahmadi A. 2024). Academic writing rarely occurs in isolation; it typically references sources as a basis for writing. Stu dents must take notes of lectures, read texts, collect information, develop thoughts, and produce an organised written response drawing from sources (Cumming 2013; Kyle 2020).

Writing is one of the three modes of linguistic expression and communication. Writing is not just a representation of speech, as it was one thought; rather, speaking, writing and signing are all manifestations of language users' knowledge, perspective and communicative competence (Matsuda,P.K. and Silva T. 2010; Canale and Swain, 1980; Bachman, 1990). The aim of writing may be 'expressive' (emphasis on the writer), 'persuasive' (emphasis on the reader), 'referential' (emphasis on reality), or 'textual' (emphasis on the text) (Matsuda,P.K. and Silva T. 2010; Kinnevay, 1971). Writing is the basis for developing key skills like reading, listening, and speaking (Abubakr Abdulrahman & Kara, 2022; Artayasa et al., 2018).

Integrated writing, also known as source-based writing, refers to a writing task composed based on information from one or more provided reading or listening sources (Safari F. and Ahmadi A. 2024). The main rationale behind using inte grated tasks is to improve authenticity by simulating the kind of writing commonly found in real- world academic and professional writing contexts (Plakans and Gebril 2017; Yang 2009). The role of the teacher emerges as a major factor in many washback studies. Alderson and Hamp Lyons (1996) investigated teacher attitudes and behavior in TOFEL preparation classes and concluded that washback effects may vary significantly according to individual teacher characteristics.

Methodology: This review synthesizes findings from peer-reviewed articles, theoretical frameworks, and case studies. It employs a narrative approach to analyze how writing assessments influence classroom practices and learner outcomes.

Design

The research design used to explore the impact of language assessment on teaching and learning in English writing skills, combining both qualitative and quantitative data sources. Convergent Parallel Design, Explanatory Sequential Design, and Exploratory Sequential Design were used as mixed methods

types. In this study, classroom observations, teacher interviews, student focus groups, and open-ended survey responses were used as qualitative data sources. The quantitative data sources used, in this study, were standardized test scores, structured survey results, rubric-based writing assessments, and statistical analysis of writing performance. The subject was distributed in the first semester of students' English Language skills course of the English Language Center at Al- Baha University. Writing skills, in this course, is a significant problem for students. So, we investigate through mid-term and final exams the poor marks in writing skills section.

Participants

The study was conducted among 27 students in English Language skills course of the English Language Center at Al- Baha University. Writing skills, in this course, is a significant problem for students. So, we investigate through mid-term and final exams the poor marks in writing skills section.

Instruments

A questionnaire, interview, and test were conducted to collect data. The questionnaire and interview were used to enhance, whereas, the test was used to measure the participants' writing skills.

Data collection procedures

Data were collected by the following procedures: (1) Test was given to participants (pre-test and post-test). Students' writing abilities were measured by using writing rubric; (2) Questionnaire was distributed for both students and teachers; (3) Interview was done after the questionnaire.

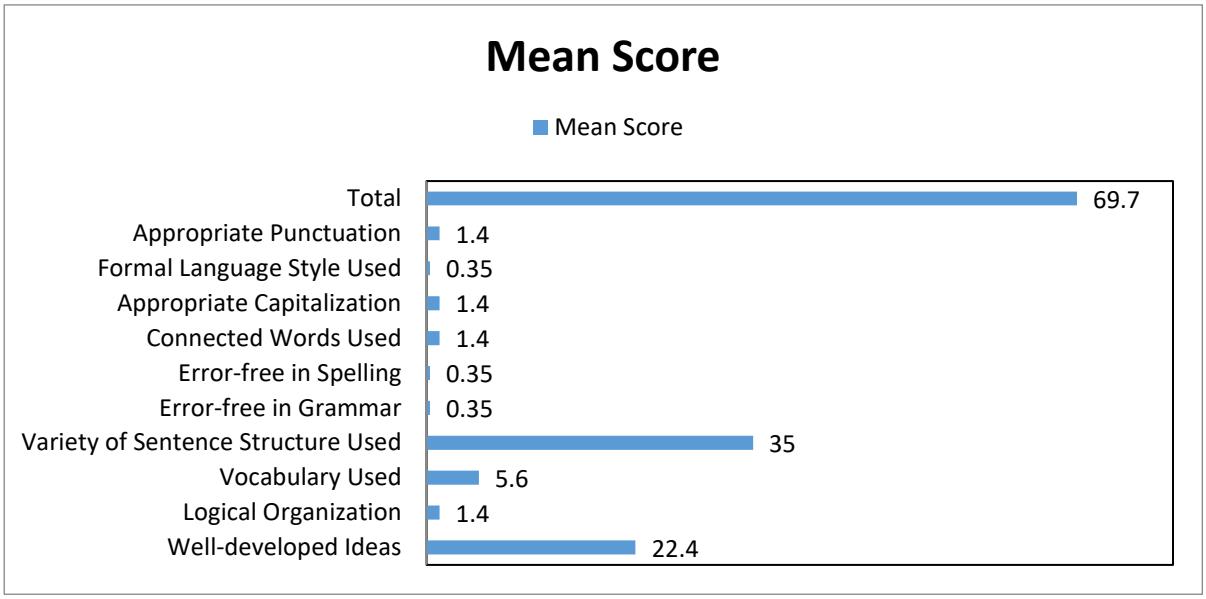
Data analysis procedures

To analyze and combine both qualitative and quantitative data in a study on washback effects in English writing instruction, researcher typically follows a structured integration process that ensures both depth and breadth of understanding. Here's how it works: the writing scoring rubric result showed great difference between the pre-test and the post-test of 27 participants. Data in this research were analyzed by using excel chart data series software program, then well-constructed according to the data given by the software. Moreover, data given by the questionnaire were displayed in the form of a percentage. On the other hands, the teachers' interviews were well-described based upon the answers provided by the respondents.

Table 1. Pre-Test Results (Mean Scores by Writing Criterion)

Writing Criteria	Well-developed ideas	Logical Organization	Vocabulary Used	Variety of Sentence Structure Used	Error-free in Grammar	Error-free in Spelling	Connected Words Used	Appropriate Capitalization	Formal Language Style Used	Appropriate Punctuation	Total
Mean Score	12.6	0.7	0.9	35	0.35	0.35	0.9	0.7	0.35	0.9	52.8

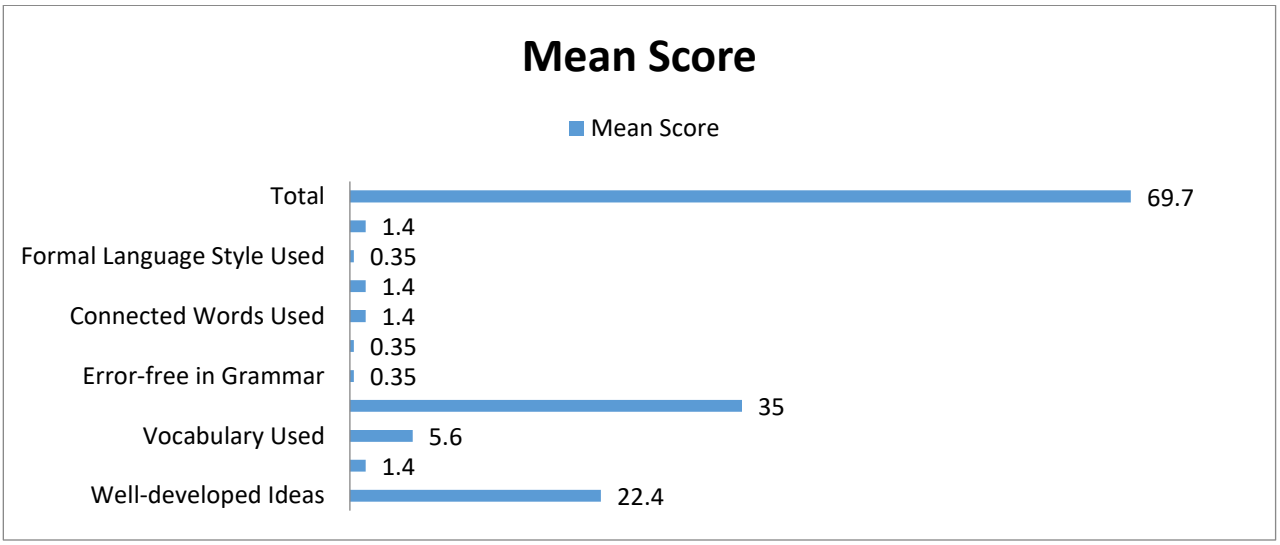
Now, here is a simple bar chart to visualize the data:



This chart highlights which areas are strongest (like "Well-developed Ideas") and which may need more attention (such as "Grammar" and "Formal Language Style"). Based on the data in Table 1 above, it can be said that participants' mean was at the adequate to fair level. This means that all aspects of writing evaluation should be developed. Thus, teachers' roles appear in this phase by using different kinds of pedagogical techniques to fix students' educational weaknesses.

Table 2. Post-Test Results

Writing Criteria	Well-developed ideas	Logical Organization	Vocabulary Used	Variety of Sentence Structure Used	Error-free in Grammar	Error-free in Spelling	Connected Words Used	Appropriate Capitalization	Formal Language Style Used	Appropriate Punctuation	Total
Mean Score	22.4	1.4	5.6	35	0.35	0.35	1.4	1.4	0.35	1.4	69.7



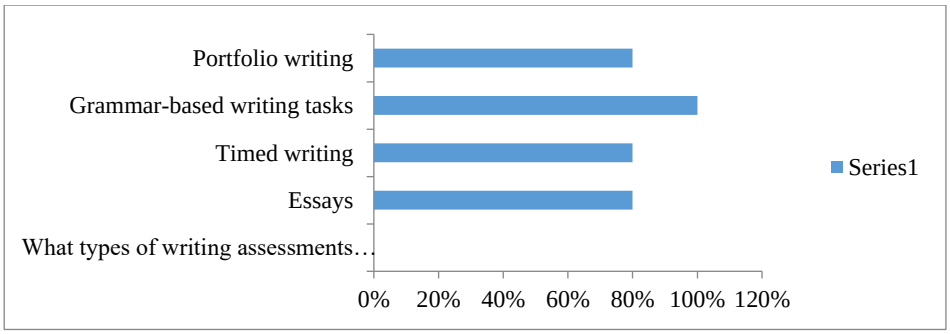
The mean post-test score (69.7) showed a notable increase compared to the pre-test mean score (52.8). This improvement reflects enhanced student performance in areas such as well-developed ideas, logical organization, and vocabulary usage, use of cohesive devices, proper capitalization, and accurate punctuation. Table 1 and Table 2 show difference in writing criteria according to writing rubrics: well-developed ideas (12.6 to 22.4), these because of the more practices students are taken during each unit. They know how to think and generate ideas to provide good writing. Moreover, this difference highlights an increase in the students' ability in logical organization (0.7 to 1.4), vocabulary used (0.9 to 5.6) ; and these for students' following teachers' instructions in doing vocabulary quizzes. The more students practice vocabulary, the more students develop their logical organization and vocabulary used. Also, there is difference in connected words used (0.9 to 1.4), appropriate capitalization (0.7 to 1.4), and appropriate punctuation (0.9 to 1.4). Students develop their writing skills after knowing how to put words

in connected sentence with appropriate punctuation such as space between words and agreement between words (e.g. verbs and nouns), and most significantly writing words in good handwritings.

During the interview, teachers reported that 20% of students demonstrated improvement in specific writing criteria, while 80% showed progress in their overall proficiency level. This disparity was attributed to several factors: students' educational backgrounds (70%), the assessment methods employed (20%), and a predominant focus on adhering to teachers' instructional guidance rather than addressing individual student needs (10%). When asked to propose remedial measures, teachers emphasized the necessity of designing their own examinations that align with both pedagogical objectives and the diverse needs of their students. Additionally, they advocated for increased writing practice tailored to establish writing criteria and the adoption of effective methodologies for teaching writing skills.

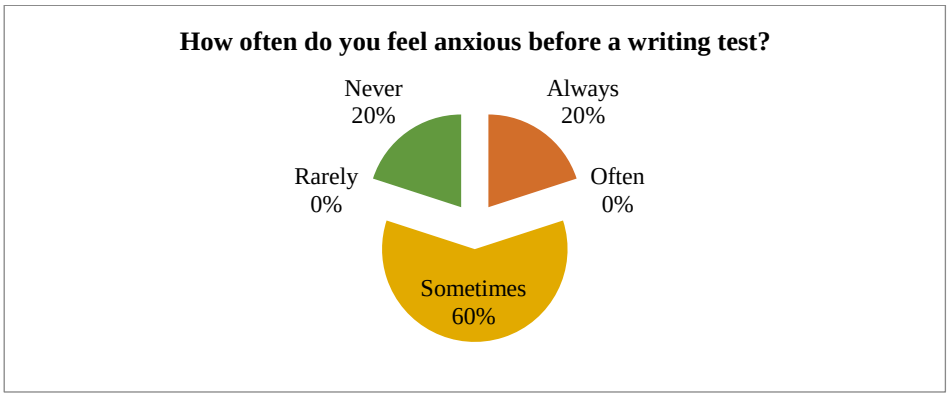
Results

Figure1. What types of writing assessments have you experienced?



The current study addresses English language writing assessments that teachers have experienced. Grammar-based writing tasks are the most of writing assessments used. Thus, they have impact on learners' languages that have been showed on learners' sentence structure used.

Figure2. How often do you feel anxious about before a writing test?



L2 learners' attitude toward language assessment was showed in Figure 2. This figure displays that the participants are sometimes feel anxious before writing test (60%). This means that they have problems in presenting well-developed ideas and logical organization.

Figure3. Do you believe writing assessments reflect your true writing ability?

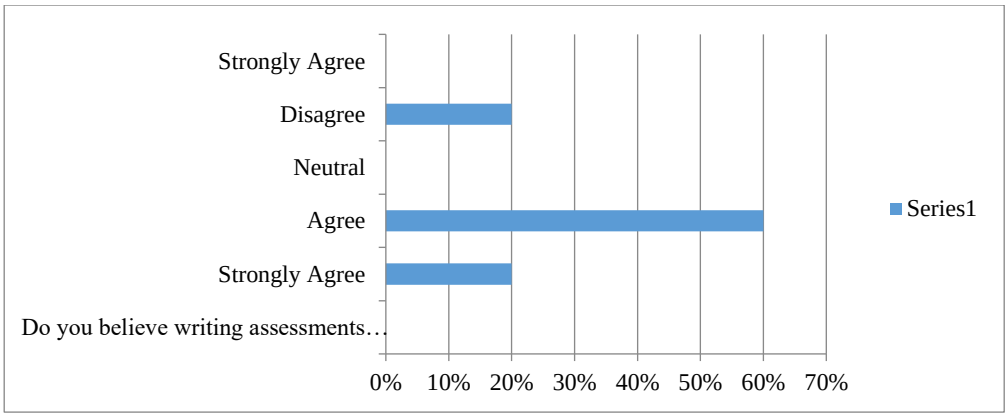


Figure 3 displayed that the participants' believe that language assessment has impact on L2 learners' language (60% agree). This means that writing assessments reflect true L2 learners' writing ability. However, it shows that L2 learners' language do change due to language assessment. Classroom assessments can play a significant role in realizing and implementing L2 learning tools and applications which can enhance student engagement and show students' strengths and weaknesses. In English language learning, classroom assessments are effective in identifying students' strengths and weaknesses, understanding student knowledge and skills, and measuring their performance level.

Figure 4. If yes, what changes have you made? (100% modified their writing instruction to align with test formats)

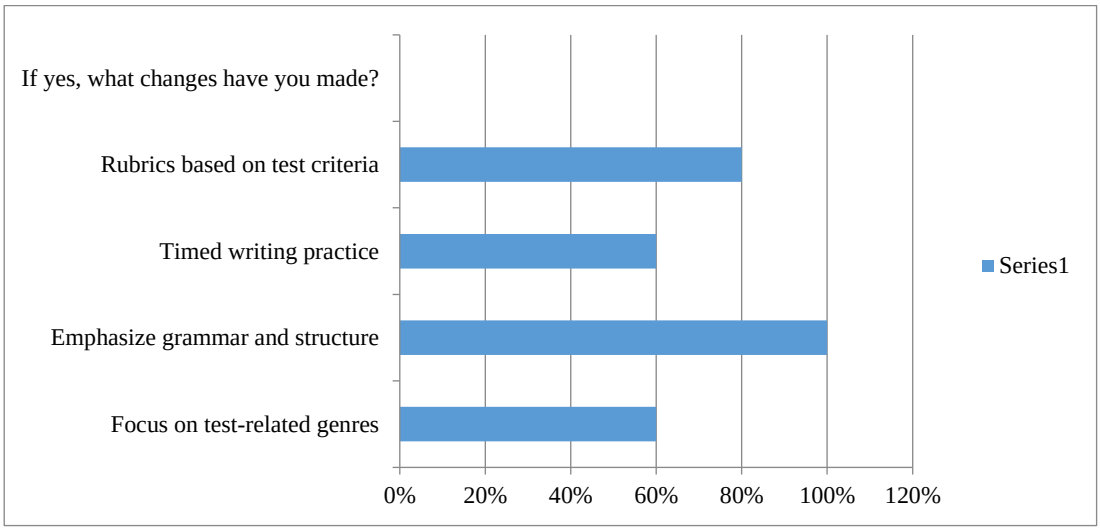
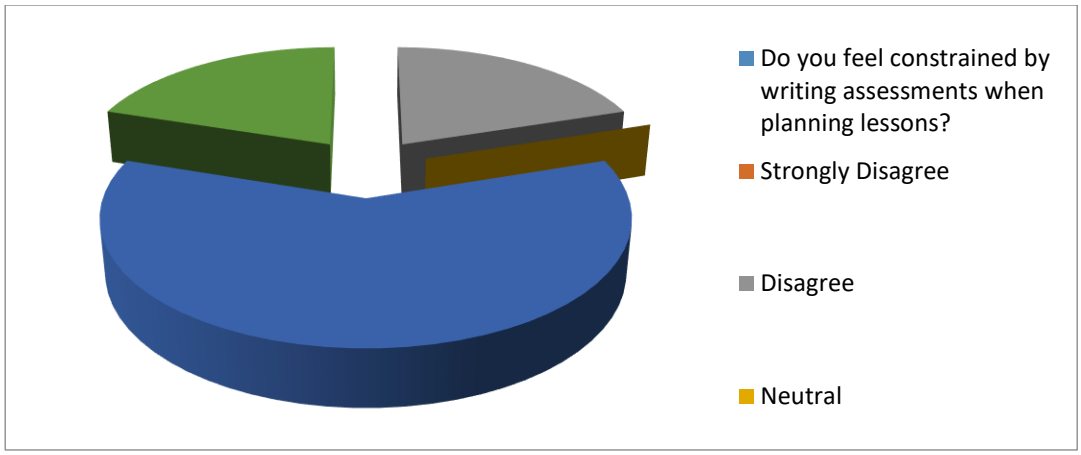


Figure 4 answer a research paper question (RQ3. How does L2 learners' language change due to language assessment?). This means that changes have been made by teachers. The changes are taken

place in rubrics based on test criteria, time writing practice, emphasize grammar and structure, and focus on test-related genres. So, it has great impact on L2 learners' language, particularly, in grammar and structure.

Figure5. Do you feel constrained by writing assessments when planning lessons?



This figure 5 showed that teachers' feel constrained by writing assessments when planning lessons. That is to say, writing assessments reflect teachers' constrained feelings when planning lessons. Thus, writing assessments reflect positively or negatively learners' language.

Figure 6. How does writing test influence your study habits?

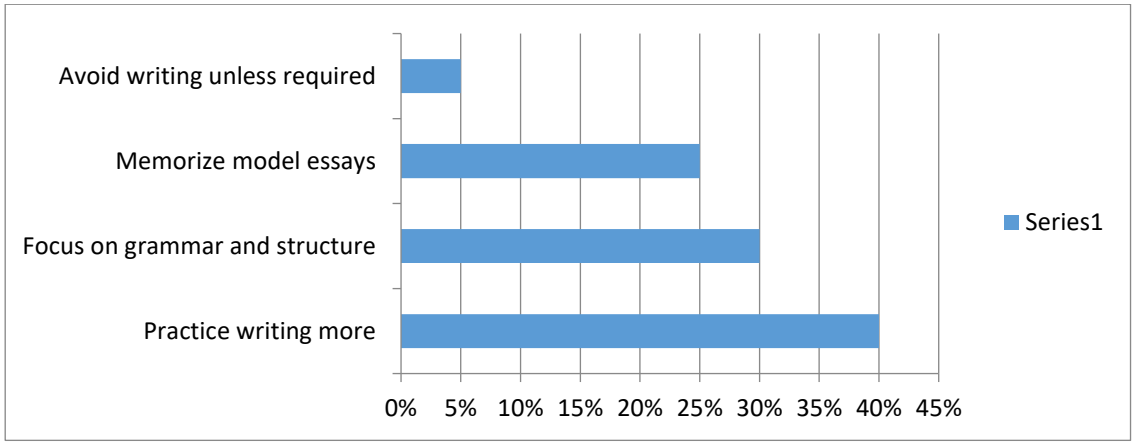
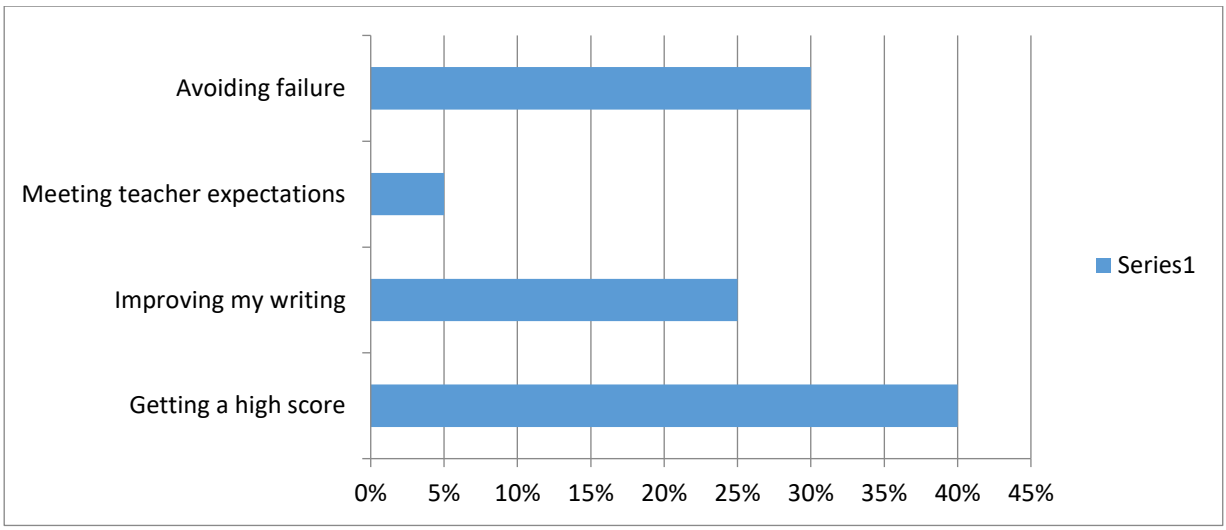


Figure 6 states that writing test has impact on students' study habits. That is to say, the more practice writing is the more writing test effects. It shows that students practice writing more than avoid writing unless required.

Figure7. What motives you most when preparing for writing assessment?



This figure 7 showed that when preparing for writing assessment, getting a high score is the most motivated thing for students (40%) in comparing to avoiding failure (30%). This means that, learners have high motivation in getting high score and high motivation in avoiding failure. So, L2 learners' attitude toward language assessment is the highest.

Discussion

The dual nature of washback underscores the need for balanced assessment design. Educators must be aware of how tests influence their teaching and strive to maintain instructional integrity. Enhancing *assessment literacy* among teachers can mitigate negative washback and promote more holistic writing instruction.

Figure 1 illustrates the types of writing assessments most commonly experienced by students. The data reveal that grammar-based writing tasks, timed writing, and essays are nearly universal, with close to 100% of respondents reporting exposure to these forms. This suggests that traditional, structured assessments remain the dominant approach in writing instruction, emphasizing accuracy, speed, and critical thinking. In contrast, portfolio writing is slightly less prevalent, approximately 90%. While still widely used, its lower percentage indicates that reflective and process-oriented assessments are not as consistently integrated into curricula. Portfolios, however, provide unique opportunities for students to demonstrate growth over time. Revise their work, and highlight a broader range of writing abilities. The figure highlights a strong reliance on conventional assessments, while also pointing to the growing but less universal adoption of portfolio-based approaches. This distribution raises important pedagogical questions about balance: should writing instruction continue to prioritize timed and grammar-focused

tasks, or should it expand further into portfolio methods that encourage creativity, reflection, and long-term skill development?

Figure 2, reveals distinct patterns in how students experience anxiety before a writing test: sometimes (60%) the majority of respondents reported occasional anxiety. This indicates that test-related stress is common but situational, likely influenced by preparation levels, confidence, or perceived difficulty. Never (20%) a fifth of students reported any anxiety at all. This group may possess strong coping mechanisms or high self-efficacy in writing tasks. Always (20%) another fifth consistently experience anxiety, suggesting a vulnerable subgroup that may benefit from targeted interventions such as relaxation techniques or writing workshops. Often (0%) and Rarely (0%) no respondents selected these categories. This absence suggests that students tend to perceive their anxiety in more absolute terms (either occasional or constant) rater that moderate levels. The findings suggest that test anxiety is widespread but varies in intensity. Most students experience it occasionally, while a smaller but significant group struggles with it consistently. The lack of responses for “often” and “rarely” highlights a tendency to categorize anxiety in clear-cut terms rather than nuanced gradations. These insights can inform educators and counselors in designing support strategies that address both occasional and persistent anxiety.

Figure 3 the responses reveal diverse perspectives on whether writing assessments accurately reflect true writing ability: Agree (60%) the majority of participants believe that writing assessments generally capture their writing ability. This suggests confidence in the fairness and validity of such evaluations, though it may also imply that assessments align closely with the skills students practice. Strongly agree (20%) a smaller but significant group expressed strong confidence in assessments as accurate measures. These individuals likely view standardized writing tasks as reliable indicators of competence. Disagree (20%) an equal proportion of respondents expressed skepticism, indicating that assessments may not fully represent their abilities. Factors such as test anxiety, time constraints, or rigid formats could contribute to this perception. Strongly disagree (0%) and Neutral (0%) no respondents selected these options, suggesting that students tend to hold clear opinions rather that ambivalent or strongly negative views. The findings suggest that most students perceive writing assessments as reflective of their abilities, though a notable minority disagrees. The absence of neutral responses highlights a polarized view: students either trust assessments or question their validity. This division underscores the importance of designing writing evaluations that balance standardized criteria with opportunities for authentic expression.

Figure 4, impact of writing tests on teaching practices. The findings indicate that all teachers (100%) modified their writing instruction to align with test formats, underscoring the powerful influence of standardized assessments on classroom practices. As shown in Figure 4, these modifications are evident across lesson planning, teaching methods, and feedback strategies. Focus on test-related genres (60%) a majority of teachers reported prioritizing genres commonly featured in exams. While this alignment may enhance student preparedness, it risks narrowing the curriculum and reducing exposure to diverse writing forms.

Emphasis on grammar and structure (100%) every teacher highlighted grammar and writing tests, where measurable outcomes are privileged. However, it raises concerns about the marginalization of creativity and critical thinking. Provision of timed writing practice (60%): Many teachers incorporated timed exercises to simulate exam conditions. This practice helps students manage pressure but may also reinforce formulaic writing styles, limiting opportunities for revision and deeper reflection. Use of rubrics based on test criteria (80%): the widespread adoption of test-aligned rubrics ensures consistency and transparency in feedback. Yet, it also suggests that evaluation is framed almost entirely by external standards reverentially overlooking individual growth and authentic expression. The results highlight how assessment-driven instruction reshapes teaching priorities. While these changes may improve exam performance, they also raise critical questions about the balance between teaching for tests and fostering broader writing competencies. The dominance of grammar and structure over creativity, in particular, suggests a long-term shift in how students perceive writing –as a technical skill rather than a means of personal or intellectual exploration.

For the point, impact of learning behaviors, Figure 6 showed that (40%) of the students practice writing more frequently. This group builds fluency and confidence through consistent practice. Frequent writing helps them internalize vocabulary, improve coherence, and develop a personal style. It suggests they value process-oriented learning rather than just outcomes. (30%) of them focus mostly on grammar and structure: these students prioritize accuracy and correctness. While this strengthens technical skills, it may limit creativity if overemphasized. Their approach reflects a rule-based learning behavior. (25%) of them memorize model essays: memorization provides templates for exam success but risks shallow understanding. It shows reliance on rote learning rather than critical thinking. This strategy may help in test settings but not in authentic writing tasks. (5%) of them avoid writing unless required: This small group demonstrates how motivation or writing anxiety. Avoidance can hinder skill development and confidence. Their behavior reflects a performance-avoidance orientation.

However, in contextual writing differences, there is test preparation writing and personal or creative writing: In test preparation writing, students tend to be more rigid, structured, and exam-focused. Emphasis is on correctness, memorization, and meeting grading criteria. In personal or creative writing, students show more freedom, self-expression, and experimentation. Creativity and individuality emerge, but technical accuracy may be less prioritized. General impact, the data highlights a tension between exam-driven behaviors (grammar focus, memorization) and skill-building behaviors (frequent practice, creative writing). Students who balance both –practicing regularly while also exploring creativity –are likely to achieve stronger long-term writing competence. The small percentage avoiding writing signals a need for motivational strategies and supportive environments to reduce writing anxiety.

The analysis of student motivation in preparing for writing assessments reveals several distinct drivers. As illustrated in Figure 7, the most frequently cited motivation was the pursuit of high scores, reported by 40% of students. A further 30% indicated that their primary motivation was the avoidance of failure, while 25% emphasized the desire to improve their writing skills. Only 5% identified meeting teacher expectations as their main source of motivation.

Complementing these findings, quantitative survey data demonstrated that 78% of students engaged in weekly practice of test-style writing tasks. This pattern of behavior was further substantiated through qualitative interviews with teachers. They confirmed that such practices were largely shaped by curriculum's alignment with national examination requirements. Taken together, these results highlight a pronounced washback effect, wherein the structure and demands of high-stakes national assessments exert a systemic influence on both instructional design and learner behavior. Specifically, the emphasis on exam-oriented preparation appears to channel student motivation toward performance outcomes (high scores and avoidance of failure) rather than intrinsic goals such as skill development or teacher approval. This underscores the pervasive role of assessment systems in shaping educational practices and leaner priorities.

Conclusion

The study examines how do L2 learners affect by language teaching and language testing? Washback is a powerful force in ELT, especially in writing instruction. While assessments are essential for measuring progress, they must be thoughtfully designed to support—not hinder—learning. So, performance assessment enables students to develop their writing skills. Moreover,

L2 learners' attitude toward language assessment is the highest. So, it develops L2 learners to be responsible for and capable of self-assessment in developing writing. Also, language assessment has

positive or negative impact on L2 learners' language. There is a strong reliance on conventional assessments, while also pointing to the growing but less universal adoption of portfolio-based approaches. This distribution raises important pedagogical questions about balance: should writing instruction continue to prioritize timed and grammar-focused tasks, or should it expand further into portfolio methods that encourage creativity, reflection, and long-term skill development?

The findings suggest that test anxiety is widespread but varies in intensity. Most students experience it occasionally, while a smaller but significant group struggles with it consistently. The lack of responses for "often" and "rarely" highlights a tendency to categorize anxiety in clear-cut terms rather than nuanced gradations. These insights can inform educators and counselors in designing support strategies that address both occasional and persistent anxiety.

Most students perceive writing assessments as reflective of their abilities, though a notable minority disagrees. The absence of neutral responses highlights a polarized view: students either trust assessments or question their validity. This division underscores the importance of designing writing evaluations that balance standardized criteria with opportunities for authentic expression. The results highlight how assessment-driven instruction reshapes teaching priorities. While these changes may improve exam performance, they also raise critical questions about the balance between teaching for tests and fostering broader writing competencies. The dominance of grammar and structure over creativity, in particular, suggests a long-term shift in how students perceive writing –as a technical skill rather than a means of personal or intellectual exploration.

The study identified that student motivation in preparing for writing assessments is predominantly shaped by performance concerns. The majority of students reported striving for high scores or avoiding failure, while fewer emphasized skill improvement or meeting teacher expectations. Survey data revealed that 78% of students engaged in weekly test-style writing practice, a trend reinforced by teacher interviews attributing this behavior to curriculum alignment with national examinations. Collectively, these findings point to a systemic washback effect, whereby the demands of high-stakes assessments influence both instructional practices and learner priorities, privileging exam performance over intrinsic learning goals.

Recommendations

Future investigations should prioritize the design of assessment practices that cultivate critical thinking, creativity, and authentic writing abilities. When assessments are appropriately aligned with curricular objectives, they generate positive washback, promoting effective pedagogical approaches and

motivating learners to enhance their writing proficiency. Conversely, negative washback may occur when test content diverges from instructional goals, resulting in superficial learning, diminished creativity, and heightened learner anxiety.

Moreover, the findings suggest that teacher behavior is often shaped by assessment demands, with instructional methods adapted to mirror test formats –sometimes at expense of broader writing competencies. Similarly, student behavior may be influenced by the dominance of exam preparation, leading learners to prioritize test-taking strategies over the genuine development of writing skills.

Assessment design: Future studies should explore innovative assessment formats that balance reliability with opportunities for students to demonstrate critical thinking, creativity, and authentic writing skills. Washback effects: Researchers should investigate both positive washback (alignment with curriculum goals that fosters effective teaching and motivates learners) and negative washback (misalignment that leads to superficial learning, reduced creativity, and heightened anxiety), with attention to how these dynamics vary across educational contexts.

Teacher behavior: Further inquiry is needed into how teachers adapt instructional practices to assessment demands, particularly examining whether such adaptations compromise the development of broader writing competencies beyond test preparation.

Student behavior: Studies should analyze how learners balance test-taking strategies with genuine skill development, and identify interventions that encourage deeper engagement with writing as a communicative and creative act.

Professional development: Future research should consider the role of teacher training and professional development in mitigating negative washback, equipping educators with strategies to integrate exam preparation while still nurturing authentic writing skills.

Policy implications: Investigations should examine how national and institutional assessment policies shape classroom practices, and propose reforms that encourage assessments to serve as tools for learning rather than solely for accountability.

Technology integration: Research should explore how digital tools and platforms can support authentic writing assessment, providing opportunities for collaborative, process-oriented, and multimodal writing tasks.

Cross-cultural perspectives: Comparative studies across different educational systems could illuminate how cultural and policy context influence washback effects, offering insights into more universally effective assessment practices.

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Investigating Saudi EFL Students' Spelling Errors at Tertiary Level: A Case Study, Al-Baha University, College of Arts & Humanities

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Abstract

This study investigated spelling errors produced by students in the Department of Foreign Languages, College of Arts and Humanities at Al-Baha University. Using a mixed qualitative and quantitative approach, written samples from twenty-five male students were analysed to identify common error types. Cook's (1999) Classification was used to categorise the errors into omission, substitution, addition, and transposition. The analysis revealed 350 spelling errors involving vowels and consonants. Overall, omissions and substitutions were the most frequent, with 153 omissions and 145 substitutions, followed by 53 additions and 44 transpositions. Vowel errors included 95 omissions, 75 substitutions, 31 additions, and 27 transpositions, while consonant errors consisted of 58 omissions, 70 substitutions, 22 additions, and 17 transpositions. These findings demonstrate that learners face persistent challenges with English spelling, particularly due to the irregular relationship between spelling and pronunciation. The results further indicate that inconsistent spelling patterns contribute to confusion and recurring errors. The study recommends providing focused instruction, explicit attention to common spelling patterns, and varied practice to enhance students' accuracy and confidence in writing. Strengthening learners' awareness of sound–letter correspondences and exposing them to frequent spelling patterns may help reduce errors and support overall writing development in academic and general writing tasks.

Keywords: Omission errors, Saudi EFL learners, Spelling, Substitution errors, Transposition errors.

التحقق من الأخطاء الإملائية التي يرتكبها الطلاب في قسم اللغات الأجنبية بكلية الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية بجامعة الباحة

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الملخص

تهدف الدراسة إلى التحقق من الأخطاء الإملائية التي يرتكبها الطلاب في قسم اللغات الأجنبية بكلية الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية بجامعة الباحة. وقد استخدمت الدراسة منهجًا يجمع بين الطريقتين الكيفية والكمية، تم جمع بيانات الدراسة من عينات مكتوبة لطلاب القسم الذكور، وقد بلغ عددها 25 ورقة، وتم استخدام تصنيف كوك (1999) الذي صنّف الأخطاء الإملائية في عينات الكتابة إلى أربع مجموعات، هي: الحذف والاستبدال والإدراج والنقل. وكشفت الدراسة عن 350 خطأً إملائيًّا في الحروف الساكنة وحروف العلة، وصُنّفت هذه الأخطاء لاحقًا إلى أربعة أنواع، هي: الحذف 153 والاستبدال 145)، والإضافة 53 والنقل 44، مع تحديد الفئات الفرعية لكل نوع؛ على سبيل المثال: أنواع وترددات الأخطاء التي حدثت في حذف حروف العلة 95، واستبدال حروف العلة75 ، وإضافة حروف العلة 31، ونقل حروف العلة 27 ، وحذف الحروف الساكنة 58، واستبدال الحروف الساكنة 70 ، وإضافة الحروف الساكنة 22، ونقل الحروف الساكنة 17. ومن خلال ذلك التحليل تشير النتائج إلى أنَّ معظم الأخطاء الإملائية هي أخطاء استبدال وحذف، وخلصت الدراسة إلى أنَّ عدم انتظام التهجئة الإنجليزية وعدم وجود تطابق واحد إلى واحد بين التهجئة والنطق في اللغة الإنجليزية يمثل مشكلة لكل متعلم لهذه اللغة. ويوصي الباحث باقتراح استراتيجيات تدعم المعلّمين لمساعدة طلابهم على أن يكونوا جيدين في التهجئة، مثل القيام بالمزيد من التمارين والتدريبات في التهجئة للحصول على أفضل فهم للتهجئة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، الأخطاء الإملائية، أخطاء الحذف، أخطاء الاستبدال، أخطاء النقل

Introduction

The process of learning a second or foreign language is challenging. Thus, ESL/EFL learners face difficulties with various aspects of the language including spelling. Spelling is considered as the starting point of the written language as indicated by Mahmoud (2013). In addition, writing compositions demands a high level of spelling proficiency in order to pro- duce a good piece of writing. Allred (1990) pointed out that spelling ability could influence the writer's effectiveness and creativity. Altamimi and Ab Rashid. (2019) argue that: “Spelling is considered an essential component of written language. The potential mistakes in written spellings may change the meaning and understanding of written material and would make it unclear. Hence, it is essential to use the correct spelling of words in order to convey the exact intended meaning of the content. In this context, Babayigit and Stainthorp (2010) state that grammatical and phonological skills make a significant contribution to spelling performance.

Therefore, it can be asserted that spellings play a pivotal role in being a primary and essential skill required by students. Accurate spelling enables writers to express their ideas and thoughts within a standard framework, which is easily understandable by their readers. For effective writing, spelling must also be effective. Altamimi & Ab Rashid (2019). Among various difficulties faced by Arab learners of English, the most common error relates to the spelling of words in documents (Al-Bereiki & Al-Mekhlafi, 2015). Students, due to ineffective learning, continue to repeat the same spelling errors, even after they have completed high school or university or have started in their field of work, which can create obstacles to their progress and development. Consequently, spelling errors can handicap students in various ways.

According to Rosenthal and Ehri (2010), spelling out loud practice increases the pace of learning the pronunciation of new words. The present study suggests that a good command of spellings enables an individual to communicate his/her thoughts more clearly and openly in their writing. Poor spelling not only makes a bad impression; it also inhibits communication, as the reader has to puzzle over the writer’s message. The concept of spelling has been defined differently by various researchers over the years.

Puspandari (2017) defines spelling as a process of representing the spoken language in a written form that consists of a sequence of letters composed to form words in their generally accepted usage. On the other hand, Mpiti (2012) defines spelling as a process that encompasses a number of skills: phonological, morphological, syntax and semantic knowledge, as well as the ability to formulate words based on visual memory along with applying the orthographic rules. Moreover, Perveen and Akram (2014) define spelling as the method for writing words in their correct and acceptable forms. In other words, it is a process of assembling the letters of a given language in accordance with their correct sequence according to the

official orthographical rules of that language otherwise; it would be viewed as a spelling error. In addition, Ahmed (2017) views spelling as a linguistic method that deals with phonemic orthography. In other words, spelling is the process of word formation by representing the oral language by using the conventional, accepted individual letters according to the rules of that particular language. According to Johnson (2008), spelling is the act of recognizing or mimicking oral or spoken words by the equivalent correct sequence of letters taking into consideration phonological and alphabetical skills and knowledge.

Statement of the Problem

Saudi EFL learners continue to struggle with spelling accuracy despite years of formal instruction. The inconsistency of English orthography, interference from Arabic phonological and orthographic patterns, and limited exposure to authentic written English contribute to persistent difficulties. Previous studies have noted that omission and substitution errors are particularly common among Arab learners, yet little research has specifically examined these issues among 3rd-year English-major students at Al-Baha University. This study addresses this gap by analyzing the nature and causes of their spelling errors.

Objectives of the Study

The main goal of this study is to determine students' spelling errors, and classify the errors created by 3rd year students at Al-Baha University in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia into four main categories. In this connection, the present research aims to achieve the following objectives.

1. To identify, classify and analyze the most common types of spelling errors committed by Saudi English –Major students in their English writing.

2. To find out the causes that leads to the problem of misspelling, and suggest suitable solutions for the problem.

3. To find out the most frequent errors in students' English writing

Questions of the Study

This study aims at investigating the spelling errors committed by the 3rd year students at department of foreign languages, at the University of Al-Baha. Hence, the study attempts to address the following research questions:

1. What are the most common types of spelling errors committed by the 3rd year students at department of foreign languages, in their English writing?

2. What are the causes of spelling problems among the 3rd year students at department of foreign languages, students at Al-Baha University?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it provides insights into the specific spelling difficulties faced by Saudi EFL university learners, an area that remains under-researched. Understanding the types and causes of these errors can help teachers tailor their instruction to students' actual needs, improve curriculum design, and enhance students' written communication skills. Findings may also contribute to developing more effective strategies for teaching English spelling in Saudi Arabia, where learners often rely heavily on phonetic writing influenced by Arabic.

Delimitation of the Study

This study is delimited to 25 male 3rd-yea.r English-major students at the Department of Foreign Languages, Al-Baha University. The data are limited to a single writing task of 200–250 words and focus exclusively on spelling errors as classified by Cook's (1999) four error types: omission, substitution, insertion, and transposition. The study does not examine grammar, punctuation, or broader writing proficiency. Results apply only to this context and may not be generalizable to other institutions or learner populations.

Literature Review

Error analysis

Crystal's (1999) (cited in Bain, 2006) defines "error analysis" in language teaching and learning, as a technique for identifying, classifying and systematically interpreting the unacceptable forms produced by someone learning a foreign language, using any of the principles and procedures provided by linguistics. Errors are assumed to reflect, in a systematic way, the level of competence achieved by a learner; they are contrasted with "mistakes," which are performance limitations that a learner would be able to correct"

As stressed by AbiSamra (2003), error analysis is a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors learners make. It consists of a comparison between the errors made in the Target Language (TL) and that TL itself. Pit Corder is the "Father" of Error Analysis (the EA with the "new look"). It was with his article entitled "The significance of Learner Errors" (1967) that EA took a new turn. Errors used to be "flaws" that needed to be eradicated. Corder presented a completely different point of view. He contended that those errors are "important in and of themselves." For learners themselves, errors are 'indispensable,'

since the making of errors can be regarded as a device the learner uses in order to learn. In 1994, Gass & Selinker defined errors as "red flags" that provide evidence of the learner's knowledge of the second language. Researchers are interested in errors because they are believed to contain valuable information on the strategies that people use to acquire a language (Richards, 1974; Taylor, 1975; Dulay and Burt, 1974). Moreover, according to Richards and Sampson (1974, p. 15), "At the level of pragmatic classroom experience, error analysis will continue to provide one means by which the teacher assesses learning and teaching and determines priorities for future effort."

Al-Khresheh (2016), illustrated: "Up until the late sixties, the prominent theory in the field of SLA or L2 learning was almost behaviouristic, which claimed that the learning was a result of acquiring a set of new language patterns. Hence, L2errors were considered as only the result of learners 'MT habits in the target language (TL hereinafter). Therefore, errors which were not explained based on this assumption will definitely be underestimated. EA, however, deals with "the learners' performance in terms of the cognitive processes they make use of in recognizing or coding the input they receive from the TL".

Mahmoud. (2013] stated out that: "Error analysis (EA) is an everlasting endeavor for the simple reason that first, second or foreign language learners, by definition, will continue to commit errors. As Mahmoud (2011, p. 29) says, "Nobody goes from zero competence to full competence in one leap." In the same vein, James (1998, p. 63) states that "as long as there is incompleteness or failure to attain full NS-like knowledge of the TL, there will be EA." Committing errors is a fact of life, so is learning from them. EA is indispensable in language teaching and it is assuming more importance as an index of language learning and communication strategies.

Al-Khresheh. (2016) in his study has written: "According to EA, a great number of errors made by FL learners are similar regardless of their MT. Such errors are caused due intralingual interference or transfer. James (1998) claims that such a type of interference from the structures of the TL itself is the main cause of intralingual errors. These errors can be created without referring to L1 features. Based on this assumption, EA serves two main purposes: the first one is "to provide data from which interferences about the nature of the language learning process can be made". The second one "indicates to teachers and curriculum developers which part of the TL students have most difficulty producing correctly and which error types detract most from a learner's ability to communicate".

According to Corder (1973), there are two main objectives of EA: one theoretical and the other being known applied. The theoretical objective checks the validity of the theories such as the theory of

transfer. In other words, this objective can help in understanding how and what a FL learner learns whilst studying a FL. On the other hand, the applied objective, "concerns pedagogical purposes" (Mahmood zadeh, 2012, p.735). This objective enables learners of L2 to learn their TL more efficiently and effectively by using the previous knowledge of their dialects for pedagogical purposes. Once L2 errors are analysed, the nature of problems and difficulties encountered by language learners will be identified. Identifying such difficulties can therefore help EFL/ESL teachers pinpoint their students' weaknesses and hence revise their teaching methods and learning materials accordingly.

Alolaywi. (2023) stated that: “within SLA, EA was first introduced by Stephen Pit Corder and his colleagues in the late 1970s and became a very popular approach for describing L2 errors (James, 1998). In 1967, Corder argued that L2 errors are significant because they can reflect some of the underlying linguistic rules. The main focus of EA is the actual mistakes made by FL/L2 learners which lately became very popular in the field of applied linguistics. Brown (1994) argued that EA has a great value in classroom research. In fact, the systematic analysis of mistakes made by FL/L2 learners allows determining areas which require reinforcement in teaching. EA was defined by James (1998) as "the process of determining the incidence, nature, causes and consequences of unsuccessful language" (p. 111). In addition, Mahmoodzadeh (2012), defined EA as "a procedure used to identify, categorize, and explain the errors committed by FL/L2 learners"

Dulay et al. (1982). Hold the belief that: “a great deal of errors made by FL learners are similar regardless of their native languages. Such errors are mainly caused by intralingual interference or transfer. James (1998) claimed that such a type of interference from the structures of the target language (TL) itself is the main cause of intralingual errors. Based on this assumption, EA serves two main purposes: first, it provides insights about the types of interferences found in second language learners' performances; second, it informs teachers and syllabus designers about the most problematic aspects of the TL that students face difficulty producing”.

Lado (1957) clearly pointed out that: “Individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to foreign language and culture—both productively when attempting to speak the language and to act in the culture, and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language and culture as practiced by natives”. Additionally, transfer is related to the productive and receptive skill either in form or meaning. In other words, EFL learners make transfer both in speaking and writing. Corder. (1975) cited in Hanane (2017) explains transfer saying that, the learner carries the habits of his or her mother tongue into the second language, when there is a

similarity between learning the TL and the mother tongue. Thus, TL is easy trough the positive transfer, however; when there are differences between learning the TL and the mother tongue, TL would be difficult and it results in negative transfer through the occurrence of errors. Temmime (2009) declares that language transfer has different names used by researchers namely; Selinker (1972) and Kellerman, (1983) called it "Language mixing", Schacher and Rutherford (1979), and Ringbon (1987) named it "Linguistic interference". However, Lado (1957) and Selinker (1972) called it "Language transfer".

The English Spelling System

Salma and Marawa (2023) explain that English spelling consists of rules and conventions that guide how words are written. It standardizes the language, promoting unity and coherence, and helps trace the historical development of English. Correct spelling also improves communication by reducing misunderstandings in meaning, vocabulary, and sentence structure. Conversely, poor spelling may lead others to perceive an individual as less educated or cultured, potentially affecting their academic and professional opportunities (Dacosta & Fransheska, 2021).

Importance of Spelling

Spelling is a language skill whereby sounds (phonemes) are represented by letters (graphemes) which constitute the smallest building blocks of written language. The structure and texture of written language begins with spelling. Most researchers, past and present, highlight the importance of spelling in writing. Al-Hassan (2006), Smedley (1983), and Cronnell (1979), for example, stress the fact that good spelling is key to efficient written communication. According to Malatesha, Treiman, Carreker and Moats (2008-2009), "Good spelling is critical for literacy and it makes writing much easier - allowing the writer to focus on the ideas to be conveyed, not the letters needed to put those ideas on paper" (p.6). In addition to the linguistic problems of misspelling, they point out its negative social and psychological effects. Cronnell (1979), for instance, states that incorrect spelling is a "serious social error, making a person, at least, illiterate if not outright ignorant" (p.202). Malatesha et al. add that misspelling frustrates and embarrasses the writer. It is worth mentioning in this connection that some people might downplay the role of spelling in writing believing that an electronic spell checker can do the job. However, as Jones (2009) says, a spell checker has undeniable drawbacks and may mitigate against language learning. It cannot detect the error when the writer produces a correct word when s/he misspells the intended word (e.g., flow instead of follow, from instead of form, made instead of maid, arrest instead of a rest).

Salih. (2008: 166) asserts that: "In language teaching and learning spelling viral role lies in the notion that spelling ought to facilitate the communicative process of written thought and ideas". Albesher. (2018) empathies spelling is important for all EFL learners in Saudi Arabia like all EFL learners around the world. It is as important and critical as any other skill such as speaking, listening, writing and reading. El-Helou (2001) has mentioned that many jobs are missed and employees are often let go because of spelling deficiencies. This is absolutely true if the job requires the employee to be skillful and knowledgeable in English in jobs such as teaching English as a second or foreign language, or translation from Arabic into English or vice versa. Moreover, doctors and pharmacists who work in hospitals need to be able to spell words correctly because misspelling can lead to serious consequences such as giving incorrect prescriptions. In addition, correct spelling is generally viewed as an indication of language competence. If students show good spelling, this means that their English skills are satisfactory.

Jones (2009) also points out that a spell checker may not give the correct word even if it recognizes an error. She says that when a writer writes *defiantly instead of definitely, the spell checker may give defiantly. No doubt spell checkers constitute an obstacle to the learning of spelling when writers rely on them believing that they can get their mistakes detected and corrected by these devices. Being at the heart of the structure of written language, spelling is equally important for reading and enhances comprehension and vocabulary development, (Ankandh, 2011; Chiappe, Glaser, & Ferko, 2007; Fender, 2008; Torgeson, Roshotte, & Alexander 2001). Jones (2009), for instance, shows that homophones such as *rain*, *rein*, *reign* would be difficult to understand if they were spelled the same way. A homograph such as wind (/wind/ - /waind/) can help in vocabulary learning since it is two words in one form. No doubt, sound-letter correspondence facilitates reading.

Even though the communicative approach does not support teaching spelling, EFL learners need to demonstrate correct spelling in many aspects of the language such as written activities, grammar drills, dictation, writing stories and many other classroom activities (El-Helou, 2001) Othman. (2017): Spelling is the learner's ability to write a word correctly. Writing accurate spelling adds to the quality of overall writing texts. The study of learners' spelling errors provides an opportunity to understand and facilitate in the learners' spelling difficulties. It will result in the improvement of learners' writing and may largely contribute to transforming learners into good writers. Spelling errors attribute to major errors in writing English. The researchers reviewed the studies that focused on students' spelling errors, especially in Saudi Arabia and found that a very few studies have been carried out with regard to the difficulties that Arab students shave in spelling.

Problems with Spelling

Salih (2008) points out that: "Unlike other languages English has a particular difficulty: most English words are not pronounced as they are spelled, this evidently turned to be a major problem and a headache for the learners of foreign language". The irregularity of the English spelling or perhaps more accurately the lack of one to one correspondence between spelling and pronunciation on English was found to be a problem for every learner of the language. Rana Sammour et.al. (2025) in their study entitled "Spelling Challenges in English as a Foreign Language: Vowels, Digraphs, and Novel Phonemes", have stated: "According to the orthographic depth hypothesis (Frost, 2005; Katz & Frost, 1992), reading and spelling acquisition are more difficult in languages with deep orthographies, such as English, where the relationship between letters and sounds is complex and inconsistent. In contrast, literacy acquisition is easier in languages with shallow orthographies, where there is a consistent one-to-one correspondence between letters and sounds. In accordance with this hypothesis, cross-linguistic studies have demonstrated that spelling in English is more challenging to master than in consistent orthographies, such as Italian and Estonian (Marinelli et al., 2015; Viise et al., 2011). English spelling is especially challenging because it requires mapping phonemes onto graphemes and learning many letter combinations and exceptions due to affixation, assimilation, and the inflow of new words to the language (Varnhagen, et al., 1997)".

Categories of Spelling Errors

Spelling errors can be classified into four main categories: omission, substitution, insertion, and transposition. An omission error occurs when a letter is left out; a substitution error happens when one letter is replaced with another; an insertion error involves adding an unnecessary letter; insertion means adding an extra letter; and transposition involves reversing the positions of letters (Cook, 1999).

Methods

This research looks at Saudi male EFL students at the University of Al-Baha's errors in spelling in English, taking into account the previous discussion. The data was analysed using a variety of analytical techniques.

Subjects of the Study

The sample of this study consists of 25 students at the Department of Foreign Languages, College of Arts & Humanities, Al-Baha University. The subjects were selected as the group for the written of composition task. The students are bilingual students (English and Arabic speakers). At the time of this research study,

the students had successfully finished their two-year EFL basic writing program, which was required of them as part of the B.A. degree syllabus. Their ages range from 19 to 22, which is comparable.

Instrument

The subjects were asked to write a well-organized essay on one of familiar topics of their academic context. They were required to write approximately 200 to 250 words and the time allotted was an hour and half. The suggested topic was "Journey to Al-Baha Historical sites'. The analysis of study is mainly based on the classification of cook (1999), who studied spelling errors committed by L2 students. Spelling errors were categorized according to Omission, Substitution, Insertion and transposition.

Previous studies

The literature on spelling errors among students contains only some studies investigating the spelling difficulties Arab students face in learning EFL. Al-Zuoud and Kabilan (2013) examined spelling errors in the written compositions of 43 Jordanian students of English at a university. They analyzed a total of 228 spelling errors in the students' written papers and categorized them into four types according to Cook's classification (1999): omission, substitution, insertion, and transposition. The results indicated that the most frequent errors were substitution and omission.

Alhaisoni, Al-zuoud, and Gaudel (2015) examined the types of spelling errors in English composition on (122) EFL undergraduate students at the University of Hail in Saudi Arabia. Data were collected through writing tasks of (53) males and (69) females in the preparatory year. The findings indicated that omission errors were considered the highest among students. And the majority of spelling errors were centralized around wrong use of vowels and pronunciation. The findings indicated that spelling errors occur as a result of anomalies existing in L2 as well as L1 interference.

Hameed (2016) studied spelling errors made by 26 Saudi EFL university students through a fifty-word dictation. Analysis revealed that 93% of the responses contained errors, mainly related to vowel sounds, diphthongs, and silent letters. Substitution errors were the most frequent, followed by omission, transposition, and insertion. Learners also applied phonetic patterns from their mother tongue to English spelling.

AlBalawi (2017) conducted a study on the spelling errors of introductory year students at the English Language Centre at Tabuk University, Saudi Arabia. The findings indicated that students committed spelling errors affecting the coherence of their academic writing, categorized as omission, addition, and substitution. The errors were often due to interference from the mother tongue, reflecting

differences between the native and foreign language systems. The study recommended further research to examine other factors, such as age and grade.

Similarly, Abalawi (2016) investigated the spelling errors made by the Saudi students (females) who are studying English language as an essential requirement to begin their academic study in Prince Fahad Bin Sultan University. This study adopts Cook's classification of errors, which categorizes errors into four categories: substitution, omission, insertion, and transposition. Participants of this study are 80 female students whose first language is Arabic. The data were collected through writing task and English spelling task. An analysis of errors established that errors of omission (59%) constituted the highest proportion of errors, whereas transportation spelling errors occurred as the lesser frequency with a percentage of (4.3%), (36 errors). The major cause of the of learners' spelling errors is due to the wrong use of vowels and pronunciation. The findings of this study emphasized more focused attention to learners' spelling errors, as spelling teaching is an essential aspect of language learning. In the light of the study findings, the researcher suggested some recommendations and pedagogical implications for future research and teaching. All the studies cited above are relevant to the current research as they share similar objectives of investigating Arab EFL students' spelling errors in writing.

Results and Discussion

This section offers the findings of the study and an analysis of spelling errors most frequently committed by 25 Saudi EFL students in the third year at the University of Al-Baha. The researcher looks at the primary sources of errors as well as the four main forms of errors: transposition, addition, substitution, and omission The study primarily references Cook (1999), who examined the percentages of spelling mistakes produced by second language learners. Spelling errors were divided into four categories: omission, substitution, addition, and transposition.

Table -1 Consonants and Vowels Spelling Errors Committed by the Subjects

No	Category	Number of Errors	Percentage
1	Consonants and Vowels Omission	153	38.73
2	Consonants and Vowels Substitution	145	36.71
3	Consonants and Vowels Addition	53	13.42
4	Consonants and Vowels Transportation	44	11.14
	Total	350	

Type of Consonants and Vowels Spelling Errors Frequency Percentage

The above table-1 shows the subjects' consonants and vowels spelling errors, with a distribution comes as follows: 153 omissions (38.73%), 97 (17.2 %), substitution, 53 (47 %), addition and 44 (56.8%)

transposition, with the total of 350 errors. Based on the investigation of 25 English-major male students written composition at University of Al-Baha, table.

Table -2 Types of Vowels Spelling Errors

No	Category	Number of Errors	Percentage
1	Vowels Omission	95	41.67
2	Vowels Substitution	75	32.89
3	Vowels Addition	31	13.60
4	Vowels Transportation	27	11.84
	Total	228	

Vowels Spelling Errors

Vowels were more frequently misspelt than consonants by the subjects in the study under examination. There were 228 subjects' errors in this category in total.

Vowel Omission Errors

The subjects' composition papers portray the following Omission vowel:

people → people

Jorney → journey

vist → visit

The problem attributes to the lack of training in spelling little exposure to the English language. The remedy in providing learners with a lot of training through big quantities of writing.

Vowel Substitution Errors

In the current study vowels substitution was ranked second from the production of the subjects the researcher cited the following examples:

enteresting → interesting

injoy → enjoy

Ivening → evening

famely → family

anather → another

The idea of the subjects' problem here is attributed to existence of a developmental error for the subjects tend to replace a letter for another as the above examples shown

Addition Vowel Errors

Addition vowel errors ranked third of the subjects spelling errors as in words:

dayes → days

nexit → next

spoort → sport

The idea of the errors here that the subjects tend to add the unwanted letter to words. The problem of adding unwanted letter impeded the communication particularly if the medium of that process is done through writing.

Transportation Vowels Errors

For example, /ei/ used instead of /ie/ and vice versa to exemplify from the subjects written papers

freind → friend

carreis → carries

daer → dear

Table -3 Types of Consonants Spelling Errors

No	Category	Number of Errors	Percentage
1	Consonants Omission	85	43.81
2	Consonants Substitution	70	36.08
3	Consonants Addition	22	11.43
4	Consonants Transportation	17	8.76
	Total	194	

Consonants Errors

In this study Subjects have displayed a lower tendency of committing consonants errors in their writing than they did with vowels. The subjects' consonants errors were 194 distributed in the following patterns.

Consonants Omission Errors

The following words are examples taken from the subjects' composition papers

smal → small

hapy → happy

diferent → different

Consonants Substitution Errors

Consonants substitution errors can be shown ad in the following words

bark → park

blace → place

bort → port

bebsi → pepsi

Foodball → football

Addition Consonant Errors

To cite from their writings

allso → also

familly → family

Transportation consonant errors

Another confusion that face the subjects in the present study is what comes first 'o' or 'w'

Examples from their writings

tow → two

twon → town

The Findings

The findings of the present study are largely consistent with those of previous research on Saudi and Arab EFL learners' spelling errors. Similar to the studies by Al-Zuoud and Kabilan (2013) and Alhaisoni, Al-Zuoud, and Gaudel (2015), the most frequent errors observed among the 3rd-year English-major students at Al-Baha University were omission and substitution errors. This pattern suggests that learners commonly struggle with accurately representing both consonants and vowels in written English, a challenge that has been repeatedly highlighted in earlier research. The predominance of vowel-related errors in our study aligns with Hameed's (2016) findings, where vowels, diphthongs, and silent letters were the primary sources of spelling difficulties. Similarly, Abalawi (2016) reported that omission errors, particularly in vowel usage, were the most common among Saudi learners, which resonates with the current study's results.

However, some differences are also apparent. While previous studies, such as Albalawi (2017) and Abalawi (2016), noted relatively low occurrences of transposition and insertion errors, the present study found a slightly higher frequency of addition and transposition errors, especially among consonants. This discrepancy may reflect differences in the sample, the specific writing tasks assigned, or the students' level of exposure to spelling instruction. Moreover, whereas many earlier studies emphasized the role of L1 interference in causing errors, the current research highlights not only L1 transfer but also intralingual factors, such as the irregularity of English orthography and inconsistent phoneme-grapheme correspondence, as key contributors to spelling difficulties.

Overall, the comparison indicates strong points of convergence between this study and prior research regarding the prominence of omission and substitution errors, particularly with vowels. At the same time,

the observed variation in addition and transposition errors underscores the influence of contextual factors such as curriculum design, instructional practices, and learner exposure to authentic English writing. These insights reinforce the need for targeted spelling instruction that addresses both common error types and the underlying causes, tailored to the specific needs of Saudi EFL learners.

8-Conclusion and Recommendations

Spelling is a complex language skill and the findings from this research study uncovered the different difficulties students face with spelling. Vowel substitution, vowel omission and consonant substitution were the most common types of spelling difficulties Saudi students in the present study face. Thus, mastering the spelling of the most frequent English words is something that needs time and a lot of effort. Spelling instruction in Arab EFL in general and in Saudi classrooms in particular should be reviewed in order to provide the appropriate spelling instruction that corresponds with students" actual spelling needs. A change to alleviate the spelling problems is necessary. This change needs to combine the efforts of all change agents in education namely curriculum designers, supervisors, trainers and teachers.

English spelling is more complex than an Arabic one. The English spelling and pronunciation system compared with the Arabic language is different, for example, Arabic is written as it is pronounced, whereas many words in English have silent sounds, and words are multi-syllabic. Students are likely to learn to pronounce the word in the wrong way when teachers do not pronounce correctly and where no courses available containing the rules of spelling, pronunciation, especially in the first levels of study. Arab students, in general, have spelling problems because of the differences between English and Arabic sound systems (such as, the number and quality of vowels and diphthongs, consonant clusters in word initial, medial and final positions and the Arabic diacritic system is different for the English sound system). The researchers concluded that students have a problem in using words, which express their ideas or opinions about the topic.

The researchers hope this study is a good work for researchers to provide them with some ideas about how they might learn about the spelling difficulties of their own learners of English. It might also help in planning spelling instruction. Actually, in writing courses in Jordan, the lack of separate section dealing with spelling rules may be attributed as a lack of attention to teaching spelling. They also suggested teaching EFL learners the rules of English spelling and more practice in spelling errors in writing tasks to get a better understanding of spelling. This study recommended conducting studies that help students in minimizing spelling errors and help them in using suitable words. Moreover, students should receive formal instruction in spelling, because it is ignored in English courses in English program at Al-Baha

University and is a skill that receives the least attention. They also suggested conducting studies that help students to have a good repertoire of vocabulary, which helps them in writing.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, particularly the prevalence of omission and substitution errors among Saudi EFL learners, the following recommendations are proposed:

1-Teachers should provide direct instruction on English spelling rules, including common grapheme–phoneme correspondences, silent letters, and irregular patterns. Emphasis should be placed on vowels, as they accounted for a large proportion of the errors.

2-Students need regular dictation and proofreading exercises to reduce spelling errors.

3-English programs should provide focused practice on vowel and consonant patterns, where most errors occur.

4-Teachers should give immediate corrective feedback on spelling during writing tasks.

5-Because many errors stem from mismatches between sound and spelling, activities that develop phonemic awareness—such as identifying minimal pairs and segmenting sounds—should be incorporated into lessons.

6-Teachers should highlight contrasts between Arabic and English orthographic systems to help students avoid negative transfer. Activities comparing similar and different sound–letter patterns in both languages may reduce confusion.

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Gender Roles and Identity Crisis in the Poetry of Anne Sexton, a Modern American Poet

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Abstract

The story of identity crisis and gender roles continues as the world is still governed by the binary system of division. The world of today is still divided into two contradictory domains and territories. Some of these binary oppositions are passivity versus activity, day versus night, and father versus mother. It seems all the dichotomies emanate from the primary opposition of man versus woman. Such a division is mainly based on gender where man is taken to be the reference point. The split between male and female is not nature-bound. It is rather culture-oriented in which man manipulates and maintains such a hierarchical and oppositional relationship to perpetuate the subordination of the female. In this binary gender system, it is the female that should carry the negative attributes while the male is established as her constant caliber. Man has the right sole to name culture and define everything including women. Thus, this piece of research attempts to explore gender roles and identity politics in the poetry of Anne Sexton, an American woman-poet whose poetry reveals women's constant search for more meaningful gender roles and a new identity outside the prescriptions of the patriarchal society. This study finds that gender roles and identity of women are molded long before they are conceived in the wombs of their mothers. Patriarchy has already designated roles for them. It has carved out a fixed identity and the rigid roles of wife, mother, housewife, nurturer, and others. However, these man-made roles are not their predestined fate or the free choice of their own. They are, rather, forced on them and dictated by a patriarchal society that does not allow the activities of women to move beyond home. Sexton's poetry underscores the fact that gender roles and female identity are a social construction rather than a biological determination.

Keywords: Gender roles, patriarchy, Anne Sexton, female identity, feminism.

أدوار الجنس البشري وأزمة الهوية في شعر الشاعرة الأمريكية المعاصرة آن سيكستون

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الملخص

إنّ إشكالية أزمة الهوية وأدوار النوع الإجتماعي ما تزال تتواصل في ظل عالم ما زال محكوماً بالنظام الثنائي للتقسيم. فما يزال الواقع المعاصر منقسماً إلى مجالين متقابلين ومتناقضين. من أبرز هذه الثنائيات: السلبية في مقابل الفاعلية، والنهار في مقابل الليل، والأب في مقابل الأم. ويبدو أنّ هذه التقابلات جميعها تنبثق من الثنائية الجوهرية المتمثّلة في الرجل في مقابل المرأة. وإنّ هذا الانقسام قائم أساساً على النوع الاجتماعي، حيث يُتخذ الرجل بوصفه نقطة المرجع والمقياس. ومن ثَمّ، فإنّ التمايز بين الذكر والأنثى ليس نتاجاً للطبيعة، بل هو موجَّه ثقافياً، يقوم الرجل بتوظيفه وإدامته من أجل تكريس تبعية المرأة. وفي إطار هذا النظام الثنائي، تُحمل المرأة الصفات السلبية، في حين يُثبَّت الرجل بوصفه المعيار المطلق. كما يُمنح الرجل الحق الحصري في تسمية الثقافة وتعريف مختلف المفاهيم، بما في ذلك تعريف المرأة ذاتها.

وانطلاقاً من ذلك، تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف أدوار النوع الاجتماعي وسياسات الهوية في شعر آن سيكستون، الشاعرة الأمريكية التي يكشف نتاجها الشعري عن سعي المرأة الدائم نحو أدوار نسوية أكثر جدوى وفاعلية، وعن بحثها المتواصل عن هوية بديلة خارج إملاءات المجتمع الأبوي. وتخلص هذه الدراسة إلى أنّ أدوار المرأة وهوية النساء قد صيغت سلفاً قبل أن يولدن في أرحام أمهاتهن؛ إذ إنّ النظام الأبوي قد حدد لهن أدواراً مسبقة، ورسم لهن هوية ثابتة وأدواراً جامدة كالزوجة، والأم، وربّة البيت، والمربية، وغيرها. غير أنّ هذه الأدوار ليست قدراً محتوماً لهن ولا خياراً إرادياً نابعاً من ذواتهن، وإنما هي أدوار مفروضة عليهن من قِبل مجتمع أبوي ذكوري يحصر أنشطتهن ضمن نطاق البيت. ويؤكد شعر آن سيكستون أنّ أدوار المرأة وهوية المرأة لا تنبثق من محددات بيولوجية، بل هي في جوهرها بناء اجتماعي صرف.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأدوار النسوية، السلطة الأبوية، آن سيكستون، هوية المرأة، الحركة النسوية

Introduction

Luce Irigaray (1993), a great feminist thinker, proposes that it is only in a different order of meaning and system can women construct a positive representation of female identity. Just like surrealists, as Mujahid Alwaqaa (2024b) reveals in a published paper, argue that our world can be better saved if we conceptualize it in a different and innovative mode away from its sharp categorization and realism. This entails the rejection of the ever-powerful notion of the universal truths including the well-stablished truth of the binary gender system. Irigaray argues that its universality is a fallacy. It is only universal from the egoistic male perspective (Irigaray, 1993, p. 69). Feminists consider gender roles and identity assigned to women are just social constructions contrived by patriarchy to perpetuate their domination and oppression of the female. So, they try to reinterpret, rename, and reconceptualize the existing culture and theories which are based on patriarchal principles and conceptualization. For example, Sigmund Freud's (1925) psychoanalysis theory poses problems to the feminist project as it ascribes women's inferiority, subordination and identity to their different biology. He states that 'anatomy is destiny.' Based on this statement, the female anatomy of women feminists is crucial in determining their identity and destiny. Nonetheless, they strive hard in their writing to change this misconception and assert that biology has nothing to do with female identity. In their view, female identity is a social construction rather than a biological determination. Furthermore, feminists explore the patriarchal idea that man is the center of the universe and woman is his mere appendage. So, a marginal existence is the only possible location for women living under the authority of patriarchy.

In the opinion of some feminists like Adrianne Rich (1979), it is wrong to extol the traditional female roles because women writers cannot deconstruct the formula of the binary system whereby the female is defined and recognized in relation to the male. They continue to operate within the existing binary system. Therefore, for women writers to define themselves in the light of feminism, they should first investigate the validity of the language they employ in expressing their female experience in a patriarchal society that molds this language to their liking. The process of self-definition is not an easy or comfortable task. In poetry, this process takes place through a linguistic medium called language which is, at the same time, suspect. For a poet especially who is a woman, it poses an additional challenge as she tries to change patriarchal assumptions embedded in the syntax and vocabulary of that language. Such assumptions imply an already patriarchally-constructed definition of the world and the female self and the relationship between them. For a female or any person belonging to an oppressed group existing in a male culture, language reflects

the way of defining or assigning an identity for her. Women's existence in such a language felt to be false. As the female poet accepts the language, she is given without questioning its validity, she is in a way or another accepting a set of capitalist, patriarchal, racist and gender assumptions which are purposefully built into the language so as to deny her of any sense of identity of her own.

Barbara Segnitz and Carol Rainey (1973) emphasize the fact that language plays a very crucial role in furthering the cause of women or sustaining their subordination and lack of self. In their opinion, the woman is trying to look for herself in male literature as subject and looks in vain. She finds that the 'I' in literature is "a masculine consciousness which has become synonymous with the human consciousness" (19). So, what a woman finds in the published literature is not her voice or real character. She discovers herself to be defined as the other or an object rather than a subject. She finds, as Rich (1979) writes, "a terror and a dream, she finds a beautiful pale face… but precisely what she does not find is that absorbed, drudging, puzzled, sometimes inspired creature, herself, who sits at a desk trying to put words together (p. 39). Scholars working in the gender domain recognize that there are cultural, sexual, linguistic, biological, geographical, and psychological identities but the individual identity is perhaps more important than the others (Alwaqaa, 2025a). To achieve a viable individual identity, women writers and feminists should rip apart the binary system on which modern Western culture rests. In this system, the male and the masculine constitute the norm, the positive and the superior. The female and the feminine are, on the other hand, the other, the negative, and the inferior. Irigaray (1998) states that "the feminine finds itself defined as lack or deficiency or as imitation and negative image of the subject" (p. 127).

In her poetry, Sexton is seriously engaged in the act of the exploration more effective roles for women within a system which permits the evolution of the female identity only within its own prescribed parameters. The work of this poet, however, does not aim to discover an unchanging and fixed female identity. On the contrary, the female identity should be distanced from the idea of the changeless and static state. Alwaqaa (2022) clarifies that constructing a fixed and changeless identity in a globalized world becomes difficult as identity is constantly shifting along a plethora of ever-changing factors. Therefore, multiplicity and profundity are qualities which distinguish the identity that this poet aspires for. In her poetry, it is understood that constructing an identity is a subjective process and this process cannot be sharply defined and finally fixed because subjectivity is constantly changing. The female self is a subject in the process of continuous becoming and transformation. The notion of the multiplicity of the female identity seems to be in a stark contrast to its clearly defined counterpart found in the patriarchal system which consolidates the idea of the

unchanging subject and order. Any person who attempts to change this order is stigmatized as a deviant or a rebel. Sexton breaks this order and warns women not to let themselves imprisoned within the bi-polar gender system. Her poems open up new ways for the imagination to invent alternative systems of thought. She realizes that there is an urgent need for change. She should change the way patriarchal culture traps a woman's identity and test the ground on which gender is fabricated. She comes to an important stage in her life and poetry when she becomes aware of the danger of putting on a mask that generates a false gender identity. Sexton's contribution to the feminist movement and heritage is significant as these gender activities become a valuable legacy for generations to come that can by manipulated to enact positive effects and initiate collective social actions (Alwaqaa, 2024a).

Review of the Published Literature

Encouraged by Dr. Martin Orne and being interested in poetry, Sexton began to watch special programs on poetry and attend poetry workshops at the Boston center where she met Maxine Kumin, John Holmes, Robert Lowell, George Starbuck, and Sylvia Plath. The poet Maxine Kumin became another most important friend and interlocutor. Writing poetry proved effective in alleviating Sexton's complex problems. In an interview, she affirmed that she "finally found something to do with [her] life!" (1985, p. 43). In his introduction to Sexton's *The Complete Poems* (1999), Kumin argues that writing poetry enabled Sexton to endure her health problems and prolong her life for as long as she could (p. iv). *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* (1960) was Sexton's first published book of poetry. It garnered good reviews. In 1961, *The Starry Night* was published, and in 1962, *All My Pretty Ones* came into existence, and *Live or Die* was released in 1966. The last collection secured her Pulitzer Prize. *Love Poems* and her play *Mercy Street* were released in 1969 to be followed by *Transformation* in 1971. She published another compilation of poetry titled *The Book of Folly* in 1972. In the year of her death, 1974, Sexton was able to complete three further volumes of poetry: *The Death Notebooks*, *The Awful Rowing toward God*, and *45 Mercy Street*. The last two volumes were published posthumously.

The published literature on Sexton's poetry in general is still lacking, not to mention the topic of gender roles and the identity crisis experienced by women. However, in a Ph.D. dissertation, Alwaqaa (2016) explores the feminist aspects in the poetry of three American woman-poets including Anne Sexton. Likewise, in a latest published article, Alwaqaa (2025b) examines the gender politics and the sense of revolt against the established traditions of the patriarchal society in the poetry of Anne Sexton and other feminists. With the exception of these studies, the researcher

could not find other published academic papers that tackle themes in Sexton's poetry except for some short articles in newspapers and short reviews in magazines. Thus, this piece of research attempts to bridge the knowledge gap existing in the published literature and aims to bring genders issues and identity politics embedded in Sexton's poetry into the limelight.

Discussion and Analysis

Sexton writes in one of her letters: "I run around begging everyone to approve and like me and then sneak back to my desk and write this stuff that people either adore or detest" (2004, p. 67). The stuff she constructs is not romantic or poems speaking of the joys of motherhood and the greatness of being the submissive wife. She writes poems that come from the dark recesses of her heart, and her destructive and oppressive life. While writing poetry does not provide all the answers, Sexton finds it to be a valuable tool for self-exploration and self-identification. She explains, "It is the split self, it seems to, that is the mad woman. When writing you make a new reality and become whole… the creative mind is the analyst who gives pattern and meaning to what the persona sees as only incoherent experience" (1992, p. 64). However, while writing is useful for creating an identity beyond the traditional roles of wife and mother; it is also deeply problematic in terms of those roles. Sexton later admits, "I realize, with guilt, that I am a woman, that it should be for the children, or my husband, or my home – not writing. … I do love my children but I am not feminine enough to be all lost in their care" (ibid.). Yet, writing poetry for Sexton appears to expose some true aspects of her real self and identity as she herself states, "I wonder if the artist ever lives his life – he is so busy recreating it …. To create is to live. To perform is essentially false. Only as I write do I realize myself. I don't know what that does to life" (2004, p. 382).

Woman, in most societies, defines herself through interpersonal relationships and her dependence on patriarchy is a marked tendency in those hardline patriarchal societies. The dominant psycho-social realities which determine a woman's identity find expression in literature as role-models. A woman transforms her cultural devaluation of her talents and capabilities into feelings of unworthiness and inferiority as these feelings epitomized in the poetry of Sexton. Inter-personal relationships are structured to maintain hierarchical relationships between the sexes. In some societies the structures are so rigidly set that even accomplished women find it difficult to create complimentary roles for themselves or eke out an identity of their own. Therefore, a woman's life is a dehumanizing and humiliating experience in a patriarchal society. The struggle to become a human being is the necessary fate that awaits a woman. This struggle is manifested in women's literature in manifold forms. In women's poetry the persona assumes different forms corresponding

to the various roles a woman is forced to assume. The different guises the persona assumes lead to multiple voices and a complex fabric of identities in which she cannot resolve which identity she should assimilate. In addition to the various roles of wife, daughter, and mother, a woman poet finds herself forced to act out the roles of unhappy woman, selfless lover, unseated mistress, reluctant nymphomaniac, innocuous doll, vicious seductress and ferocious witch.

Sexton undergoes an identity crisis due to her inability to establish meaningful and abiding relationships with the world around her. She attempts to resolve this crisis either through adventurous love or by writing poetry, wherein the urge to return to the past becomes, in essence, an occasion for the celebration of the body. Unfortunately, her incapacity to solve this crisis resulted in self-destruction and self-annihilation. In her recent biography of Anne Sexton, Diane Wood Middlebrook has transcribed Sexton's conversation with Martin Orne from the audiotape of a therapy session, “I suspect that I have no self. So, I produce a different one for different people. I don't believe me, and I seem forced to constantly establish long fake and various personalities” (1991, pp. 62-3). This confession indicates the nature of Sexton's conflictual relationships characterized by a deep crisis of identity. All the inter-personal relationships which she is involved in give insights into the socio-psychological complexity of living as a woman in a patriarchal society. She builds up a separate self to nurture each relationship and to abandon or repress it later when the relationship is made or done. A sense of skepticism of the significance of each relationship and a streak of guilt pervade all her relationships, with the exception, perhaps, of her relationship with Martin Orne. Middlebrook observes that Sexton's tendency to sexualize her significant relationships, appears to be a habit which makes up a clinical picture of the poet as a woman undergoing sexual trauma. Sexton mystifies facts and memories and even parades and mixes fictional relationships in her poems. This seems to be a reflection on her pathologically unbalanced mind with untapped creative potential.

In “Mother and Jack and the Rain,” Sexton experiences the same identity crisis found in Nana poems and this poem is apparently dealing with the historical Oedipus myth. The speaker identifies herself with the mother. She feels the father's kiss but inhabits the mother's heart. Here the message conveyed seems to be that woman is reduced to the medium for man's journey. The sailor's booty takes the form of mother's body concealed from the daughter by the wall through which the father can reach the girl. Jack comes to stand for the father. As the girl obtains womanhood, probably at the initiation of the father, her mother is dead. The central conflict in the poem revolves around the haunting and cursing of the rain outside and the affirming and endorsing of the poet's identity

inside. Ultimately the tensions are resolved by writing poetry becomes for the speaker the daily bread and place of worship and self-exploration. So, the authorial identity often seems to overwhelm the other forms of identifications and of prior significance to the poet. By composing the fragments of the poem, the speaker is in a sense composing her real identity. The thematic and formal significances of rituals of mastery are combined in the poem.

With this pen I take in hand my selves
and with these dead disciples I will grapple.
Though rain curses the window
let the poem be made (*The Complete Poems*, 1999, p. 109).[1]

Composing a poem for Sexton becomes a ritual as it offers her an opportunity to find her true self. She writes against the desires of a male authority. The speaker identifies with her female body which is seen by patriarchy as a source of shame. The speaker's mother becomes dead either in thought or in feeling as the mother represents the patriarchal ideology.

In "Christmas Eve", Sexton cogitates on the hung picture of her mother. She sits alone musing over the portrait of the deceased mother as she is sipping ‘Christmas brandy’ late at night. The problem of the identification is evident.

I sat up drinking the Christmas brandy,
watching your picture,
letting the tree move in and out of focus.
the bulbs vibrated.
they were a halo over your forehead (CPS, p. 139).

The speaker temporarily attains peace as she sees herself reflected in this image as both daughter and mother. Sexton strategically invents a Christian ritual to seek forgiveness of the mother and to initiate a personal journey of self-exploration. There is a sense of guilt and anguish at her remembrance of the mother.

I saw you as you were.
Then I thought of your body
as one thinks of murder… (CPS, p. 140).

Again, the body is identified with the mother. She recalls her mother's cancer and death.

I touched a present for the child,

[1] All the poems have been taken from the same source. Henceforth, this reference is abbreviated to CPS.

the last I bred before your death;
and then I touched my breast
and then I touched the floor
and then my breast again as if,
somehow, it were one of yours (CPS, p. 140).

The breast is at once the symbol of life-giving milk and death-dealing cancer. The last part of the poem is the verbal performance of a rite. It is a recurring technique in Sexton's poetry that she identifies Nana or her mother or her daughter through her identification with the female body. In its final sickness, the body of the speaker's mother murdered its identity; however, the same body generates the living body and identity of the speaker-daughter. It is through body, through motherhood that the identities of various generations are evolved.

So, the female body and the essence of womanhood have become important sites for power and identification in Sexton's poetry. As many of Sexton's poems investigate the female identity in relation to women's traditional roles and patriarchal ideology, "In Celebration of my Uterus," she proudly celebrates female identity in spite of the fact that many readers and critics commonly complain that Sexton's work in general is so full of despair, depression, uncertainty, and death. This poem was written after one of her doctors proposed that she may have a hysterectomy. In studying gender identity as linked to biology, female sexual reproductive organs have been the crucial factor in women's conception of themselves and the world around them. Such organs are employed by feminist poets as a synecdoche to emphasize womanhood and to investigate female identity. Polivy thinks that "a threat to (reproductive) organs can easily constitute a threat to a woman's whole self-concept of femininity" (417). While biological essentialist theories have justifiably been the subject of much criticism, the body does seem to play an important role in establishing female identity.

In the case of "In Celebration of my Uterus," the biological aspect of womanhood and female identity is highlighted and celebrated. In one of Sexton's letters to Robert Bly, she writes, "today is a special day for me…. Day before yesterday they were going to give me a hysterectomy but yesterday I went to some big deal specialist in Boston and I can keep it. So saved is a part of the soul of the woman who lives in me" (2004, 302). The poem begins with an image that can be interpreted as the potential for new life and the source of vitality and mobility. The speaker proclaims to her public readership that

Everyone in me is a bird.

I am beating all my wings.
They wanted to cut you out
but they will not.
They said you were immeasurably empty
but you are not.
They said you were sick unto dying
but they were wrong.
You are singing like a school girl.
You are not torn (CPS 181-2).

The poet defiantly reaffirms that her reproductive organ, the uterus, which the doctors told her that is “immeasurably empty” and “sick unto dying,” is in reality “not torn” or unhealthily affected. Repetition of similar propositional lines such as “they will not,” “you are not,” “they were wrong,” and “you are not torn” emphasizes the triumphant and celebratory tone of the poem and the necessity for self-assertion. Her uterus and its potential to produce life is a part of her essential female identity, and she personifies and apostrophizes the uterus by directly and intimately addressing it as if speaking to a beloved one in the second stanza.

Sweet weight,
in celebration of the woman I am
and of the soul of the woman I am
and of the central creature and its delight
I sing for you. I dare to live.
Hello, spirit. Hello, cup.
Fasten, cover. Cover that does contain.
Hello to the soil of the fields.
Welcome, roots (CPS 182).

These lines are very positive, and the tone is victorious, enhancing the analysis that this celebration is not only of a body part but of the poet's identity as woman, of "the soul" of the woman she is, of "the central creature and its delight." The life-giving aspect of women is asserted with "I sing for you. I dare to live" and images of fertility and generation are underscored in metaphorical descriptions of "the soil of the fields" and "roots." The mundane, fertile image is reinforced later in the poem with words such as "plant" and "harvest," and some of the images have almost primitive, ritual connotations, such as "let me drum," "let me carry bowls for the offering" and "let

me make certain tribal figures." So, in its totality, these images effectively boil down to the fact that Sexton's female organs are substantially her identity.

Therefore, this poem is a tribute to women who, as a whole community, are created and celebrated in words in honor of their femaleness, as the line "Many women are singing together of this," transparently suggests. A variety of multi-national women all over the world have been listed in the poem engaging in various occupations and activities, yet united by their sense of womanhood and biological identity. According to Ostriker, this poem finds unity where the culture propagates division between a woman's sexuality and her spirituality, her creativity and her procreativity, herself and other women, her private and public self (1986: 111). Thus, the similarities among women of various geographies in terms of their jobs, roles and destinies are highlighted, extending from the specific image of "one is straddling a cello in Russia" or "one is stretching on her mat in Thailand" to the more universal delineation,

one is
anywhere and some are everywhere and all
seem to be singing, although some can not
sing a note (CPS 182).

The women mentioned within the lines of this poem encompass a wide range of female age groups from the young "nineteen-year-olds" to a mother who is "wiping the ass of her child" to one who is "dying but remembering a breakfast." In this celebratory poem, womanhood assumes more importance than age, occupation or nationality. The poem concludes with one word, "yes," forming the last line and reaffirming the communal identity of women all over the world. While so many of Sexton's poems are replete with uncertainty and hesitation, this short, decisive, and positive ending calls and encourages women to celebrate their femaleness and their procreative powers.

However, this poem received mixed responses, both positive and negative. Charlotte Otten (1986) notes that, "In Celebration of My Uterus" Sexton not only wrote "what was considered by many an outrageous poem on an unseemly subject, but she went on the poetry circuit and read this poem to mixed audiences… the first shock was felt round the world" (p. xxi). While this poem obviously addresses female anatomy, one may ask: why is it so outrageous? The only line that uses any kind of vulgar language is the one which mentions "wiping the ass of her child," but this is crude that fits in with the earthly maternal feel of the poem. This poem, no doubt, made a shock at the time it was written when such topics were less frequently discussed. Today; however, there are several female poets who write poems on similar topics in a much more frank and graphic manner.

In his "Foreword" to Sexton's *Complete Poems*, Maxine Kumin (1999) praises her for the paving the way for women to write about such subjects. He writes.

> Women poets in particular owe a debt to Anne Sexton, who broke new ground, shattered taboos, and endured a barrage of attacks along the way because of the flamboyance of her subject matter, which, twenty years later, seems far less daring. She wrote about menstruation, abortion… incest, adultery, and drug addiction at a time when the proprieties embraced none of these as proper topics for poetry. Today, the remonstrances seem almost quaint. Anne delineated the problematic position of women – the neurotic reality of the time – though she was not able to cope in her own life with the personal trouble it created (p. xix).

As Kumin notes, what was once considered shocking is far more common and acceptable in poetry today, although not all readers approve of such candid writing about the female body.

Along the same lines, the poem entitled "45 Mercy Street" displays the portraits of the artist as a young lady whose femaleness is a source of identity. The poem is based on the context of the twenty third Psalm from the Bible. Sexton writes, "Surely goodness and mercy shall/ follow me all my days of my life." In these two lines, the poet playfully stresses the words "surely" and "mercy." The poem's ultimate message is to express the wonderful female capacity for compassion, the female ability to accept and forgive. The personae of the poem are all female; the daughters, mother, the grandmother, Nana, and friends with whom the speaker seeks to identify as Linda Wagner-Martin (1989) states that "…the poet, unable to find independence in marriage, turns to her womanliness as her chief identity" (p. 160). The poem is replete with a sense of irony that mainly lies in the statement of the disillusioned speaker identified as married Anne; "this is no dream / just my oily life." So, the speaker divulges her frustration and anger.

> Who wants to own the past
> That went out on a deep ship
> And left me only with paper? (CPS 483).

In the end, the poet is abandoned with her only consolation and devising to mould an identity for herself.

> I live in,
> my life,
> and its hauled up
> notebooks (CPS 484).

In "The Double Image", the speaker splits herself between the doubles of her mother and her daughter (CPS. 35-42). Having found it difficult to establish an identity for herself, the speaker judges herself with the double images of mother and daughter, yet the speaker feels guilty about her attempt to piece her life together through double images. She believes that she may get along well because of her children. They make her feel herself, but she ultimately cannot cope up with these strategies that may keep her out of self-disintegration and destruction. However, in "Suicide Note," Sexton highlights the tragedy of being a woman. She states that it is "far better / not to be born twice. / It is better not to be born a woman" (CPS. 156-9).

In contrast to "Suicide Note," and "Double Image," "The Fortress" is a poem that reveals the bittersweet memory and dangerous hidden connections between mother and daughter. The poem explores the theme of communal identity, female community and solidarity rather than individuality. The traditional notion of the extended family is powerfully presented in the poem. The title suggests a lion defense against the external threat. The poet creates images as a defense mechanism, as a kind of cure and self-identification. The sleeping child's wishes elude the mother. They are both cut off from an assured future.

Darling, life is not in my hands:
life with its terrible changes
will take you, bombs or glands,
your own child at
your breast, your own house on your own land.
Outside the bittersweet turns orange.
Before she died, my mother and I picked those fat
branches, finding orange nipples
on the gray wire strands.
We weeded the forest, curing trees like cripples (CPS 67).

Sexton believes that the love between the mother and the daughter has greater redemptive power than any religious faith. It is clear that the speaker has a sense of her own value as a mother; "What ark / can I fill for you when the world goes wild?" Despite the fact that she 'cannot promise' that her daughter's wish will be fulfilled, the poem accentuates their domestic alliance, their togetherness and their common identification, which forms a 'fortress' against 'the bombs' of experience. The shared experience of the past is an abiding memory.

I give you the images I know.

we laugh and we touch.

I promise you love.

Time will not take away that (CPS 67).

Sexton's ambivalent attitude creates an internal conflict between the identity of being a poet or a housewife. In her letter to Doctor Orne, her therapist, she furiously goes as far as to protest: "You so winningly said 'People come first' meaning before the writing. You forced me to say the truth. The writing comes first" (2004, p. 349). While this is a harsh criticism, juggling the demanding roles of a typical woman and writer is a common theme in female personal poetry, that is to say a conflict between an authorial identity and the traditional roles of woman will never cease. To be a writer and at the same time a wife and mother are strenuous and time-consuming. These challenging activities of pursuing both tasks simultaneously appear frequently to lead to guilt and resentment in the writer and feelings of abandonment or neglect in the members of the family. For the personal and feminist poet this crisis of coping with the responsibilities of these occupations is aggravated by possible disapproval from family, friends and readers not only of the activity of writing, but also the themes and subjects which are discussed in the writing itself. Because of these contradictory impulses and obligations, female writers of personal poetry can feel as if they are split into two irreconcilable identities. In "Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson," Adrienne Rich (1979) states.

> It is extremely painful and dangerous way to live – split between a publicly acceptable persona and a part of yourself that you perceive as the essential, the creative and powerful self, yet also as possibly unacceptable, perhaps even monstrous…. For many women the stresses of this splitting have led, in a world so ready to assert our innate passivity and to deny our independence and creativity, to extreme consequences: the mental asylum, self-imposed silence, recurrent depression, suicide, and often severe loneliness (p. 114).

Sexton's poetic successes serve to create more tension in her home life, with her husband once tearing up her poetry and throwing her typewriter across the room (Middlebrook, 1992, p. 80). However, she is not willing to give up something that is helping her to reach some idea of a separate self and personal achievement that domestic life simply cannot provide. And after all, why should it be a choice between writer or wife and mother? This conflict of devotion and identification is manifested in Alicia Ostriker's (1983) statement, "That women should have babies rather than books is the considered opinion of Western Civilization. That women should have books rather than babies is a variation on that theme. Is it possible, or desirable, for a woman to have both" (p.

162).

Likewise, Sexton could not accept the roles of wife and mother as her own identity because it was not the personal fulfillment that he searched for in her life. Something stirred within her that desired more than changing poopy pants, cooking supper, and cleaning the house. The desire to weave words into inflammable ideas burns in her heart. To write in her own voice and makes poetry is her ultimate dream and relief. She experiences the same feeling that Plath (2000) vehemently expresses in one of her journal entries: "My happiness streams from having wretched a piece out of my life, a piece of hurt and beauty, and transformed it to typewritten words on paper? How can he know I am justifying my life, my keen emotion, my feeling, by turning it into print?" (p. 22). Poetry is her life, her savior, and her redeemer, as Sexton clearly states in one of her letters: "The thing that seems to be saving me is the poetry" (2004, p. 51). So, poetry is a place where she is in control and where she can only belong to her words. In relation to her search for her identity, Sandra Gilbert (1977) proposes that Sexton wrote to carve her own paths on the road to self-definition. If she can define her life through poetry, she can discover her lost identity. Gilbert states that Sexton writes "in the hope of discovering or defining a self, a certainty, a tradition"(p. 446). The spirit of the writer, Therefore, would hopefully be the missing piece to her lost identity; however, to be a writer was not a woman's role in the patriarchal literary canon. Men fill the academia roles, the professional roles, the writer roles, and there is no place left for a woman. This poet feels uneasy in the roles of wife and mother. Her passion seems to be her doom, couched in her words. She writes only to be rejected in the role of writer. She strives for an identity that society would not allow her.

Sexton does not come to a safe anchor regarding her true identity, her identifications with people within and around her are momentary and unstable. She strives hard to discover herself and solve the persistent question of identity, but her efforts come to a total failure. She struggles to find words and manipulate them for her own purpose so as to construct a new perspective and an identity in her own terms. She composes a poem titled "words" in which she explores her female identity as a poet in relation with language. Words for her are very important tools in fulfilling her life and filling the empty crevices of her mind. It seems that words control her rather than controlling them. They, simultaneously, become her savior and condemner. She writes, "Be careful of words, / even the miraculous ones" (CPS, p. 463). In her work, Sexton reaches at a point when she becomes weary of words because they do not provide her with solutions to her psychological traumas, social problems and mental disintegration. In her poem "Ambition Bird," she decides to give up the life

of words. she writes, "I must get a new bird / and a new immortality box. / There is folly enough inside this one" (CPS, p. 300). She is actually hesitant about her situation because she is not clear about what she exactly wants. She is severely torn between her role as a writer and her role as a housewife. In this poem, she seems to deny the part of her self that writes. She longs for a simple life.

Nonetheless, the life of this poet is never a simple one. Words control her minds; words are the imprints on her hearts. Poetry was the identity that is placed upon her lives. She writes what others cannot describe. She writes poems that make the world blush. The world and the time she lived in was simply not ready for this scandalous woman and her daring poems speaking of female genitalia, sexual inhibitions and female wishes. Sexton defies the norm as she states in one of her letters that such women "are damned for being tragic and confessional constantly from both sides of the ocean…" (2004, p. 278). Confessional literature is quite similar to autobiographical literature; however, the former entails the confessions of private life whereas the latter is, according to Yahya Dahami (2025), focusses on writing the self.

Thus, it seems clear and inevitable for this woman writer to reclaim words and images and the way they are put together. She feels the dire necessity to revise the whole tradition of poetry and repossess and reinhabit the male-constructed language. This involves a gradual and strenuous process of renaming and reviewing that language. This process applies not only to Sexton but also to a number of modern American female poets. Therefore, five stages are essentially required in the process of renaming and redefining the traditional concepts of gender identity. Most groups which are designated by society as the 'other' need to work through these stages in the establishment and progress toward a real female voice and a true self wholly their own. This is true not only of poetry but in general of the literature of the dispossessed and the excluded such as women and slaves. In a paper on the power of literary discourse on furthering the cause of human rights such as freedom and equality, Alwaqaa (2019a) argues that social action can be effected through the masterful use of literary language. Sexton’s work may be located primarily at one point in this process, or she may travel through a number of stages in the course of a lifetime of work.

In the first stage of language revisionist process, the female writer accepts the definition of self and a prefabricated identity ascribed to her by the dominant voice in the culture. In this culture that voice is white, male and authoritative. The female individual in this stage is entirely oppressed and reduced because she is unconscious of the contradictions in which she lives and which she has thoroughly internalized. The second revisionist step is called dual consciousness, in which the

woman is aware of two contradictory definitions of self and identity. The first one is imposed from outside actually by patriarchy, which defines the way she is supposed to act, and the second one is a growing sense of self that contradicts that earlier definition or the imposed identity. DuBois (1965) comments on this consciously double existence. He writes, "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others" (p. 16). Stage three of language revisionist strategy towards establishing one's identity is the beginning of redefinition and self-exploration. Renaming begins with unnaming as the poet stands apart and separates out the false or other-defined self and brings it to limelight by pointing out its fallacy and invalidity. As the female poet specifies and spots the false self and recognizes male-imposed identity, then she is simultaneously unnaming it, cancels it out part by part. Therefore, unnaming is a central and necessary step to the process of renaming.

Although this stage is uncomfortable and sometimes excruciating as the individual gives up parts and qualities of her former self that are no longer useful. The stage of unnaming is difficult and dangerous as it involves a courageous confrontation of the false self and the beginning of constructing a new one. This process is frequently painful and at the same time daring. Unnaming is somehow frightening because traditional concepts and taboos are being scorned and spurned away. In this respect Rich (1979a) writes.

> The void is the creatrix, the matrix. It is not mere hollowness and anarchy. But in women it has been identified with lovelessness, barrenness, sterility. We have been urged to fill our 'emptiness' with children. We are not supposed to go down into the darkness of the core. Yet, if we can risk it, the something born of that nothing is the beginning of our truth (p. 191).

The fourth stage in the process of establishing a new female identity involves redefining and renaming the self. The female individual connects parts of the self and puts the self back together emanating from self-discovery and then self-identification. There is exhilaration and exuberance at the beginning of naming, where the female poet reclaims language, mythology and history as well as her self. In the last stage of identity construction, the renamed self renames the world and finds a new balance. She brings the world, through language, into an alignment with the new designated self.

Most of Sexton's poetry is at the stage of unnaming, of recognizing and cancelling out the other defined self. "The Double Image," for example, is a poem of unnaming, since the speaker labors hard to exorcize her mother in herself. Thus, the pain of her poetry comes from her unsuccessful

attempts to rename one's self and then the world around. She tries to throw away her older self and give birth to a new one, but in every trial, she fails coming back to the same place and the same face. She seems to be in a pit trying to climb up the sides, slipping and falling back to the bottom again and again until she is exhausted and cannot do it anymore. She does not break through from unnaming to renaming at least partly because of her profound isolation from other women, and to some extent of the patriarchal constraints to spell out her identity. In poem after poem, it is clear that she sees herself struggling alone with a male defined tradition of poetry within a society that is at large patriarchal. She is isolated temporally from a female tradition and spatially from a community of women because of her constant mental illness that kept her in a mental asylum for most of the time. Though she herself does not make it, her poetry does. Her struggle to survive has had a deep and continuing effect on the women poets who write after her.

Her poetry is distinguished by a tension or dialectic between dismantling the old concepts, images, and traditions and then piecing them together in new, different and fresh ways that provide an opportunity to woman's self-assertion and recognition. A creative tension around identity is at the center of the work of this poet. Her poetry is both individual and political not only in the sense that the personal is political and that; therefore, the poet, in expressing her particular reality, is engaged in a political and social act, not only in the sense that art is inevitably political in that it emerges from and expresses the social dynamics and tensions of a given age and place, but in the very specific sense that it is conscious of itself as coming out of a triple female experience of oppression, womanhood, and otherness.

One of the most oppressive concepts and images that patriarchy has invented is the ladyship ideal in order to blur and confuse women's real identity. Sexton has to fight to transform the image of lady found in Plath's poetry. This lady image is one of the more oppressive stereotypes a woman has to encounter and subdue. In this image women are soft, gentle, Christian, graceful, sweetly maternal and nurturing, fluffy headed, incompetent, gracious, small and weak, quiet and polite. So, society strives to maintain this cluster of images and qualities that add up to lady in order to guarantee its hegemony and exploitation with its typical instructions: ladies do this, ladies do not do that, be a little lady now, and so on. The concept of Lady is synonymous with the kind of woman supposed to be in Western culture. It is middle to upper middle class, white, idealized blond woman. Ladyship upholds the superiority of man as it is created by a patriarchal society. Therefore, to change this patriarchal structure is tied up with the need to change the language and social attitude towards such concepts. The new definition and identity that Sexton assumes does not

totally expel the image of ladyship; rather it is an essential facet in the construction of the new identity.

Moreover, the doll image created by patriarchy is another oppressive one closely connected to the concept of ladyship that women are forced to emulate. These Western images are designed to subordinate women and deprive them of an authentic identity. Society demands woman to be the beautiful, perfected doll, and her dead body should wear the smile of accomplishment. A doll has become the ultimate epitome of womanly perfection in society. Many female poets project this social prefabricated doll ideal that a woman should embrace. This image of woman should consist of voluptuous breasts, a tiny waist, curvy hips, long legs, and she is always smiling happily with no serious thoughts running around in her head. Marge Piercy, (1973) for example, captures this female persona perfectly in her poem titled "Barbie Doll," "She was advised to play coy, / exhorted to come on hearty, / exercise, diet, smile and wheedle" (pp. 25-26). So, Barbie is an object; beautiful on the outside and empty on the inside irrespective of whoever her purchaser decides her to be; a mother, a teacher, a nurse, or a model. Yet, one must remember that Barbie is not real. She is only an artificial construction made of plastic by man. Garry Leonard (1992) states: "A body ‘isn’t necessarily a figure’ because a perfect figure would in fact be a dead body!" (p. 61).

Sexton’s time of existence was not about asking questions about the nature of her roles. His time was about looking pretty and keeping quiet. Yet, she was a woman who had a difficult time keeping her mouth closed. Her poetry and her life tell another story. The doll image of beauty and perfection that society projects upon women haunted this poet who tries hard to shatter this image and to tackle the disappearance of both beauty and youth in her poetry. For instance, Sexton's poem "Woman with Girdle" deals ironically with the concept of aging and how to solve this problem facing women in advanced age. So, surgery and girdles seem to be the society's concoctions for these aging women to remain the perfect and doll-like ideal. In this poem, what the woman actually wants is to physically remove old skin through a surgery. The picture is disturbing and disgusting as an old woman is subject to a painful beauty surgery to her face so as to live up to the society's doll-like image of woman who should be "Pink and smooth as a baby." She wants youth and beauty forever to remain a doll of society. The images of an old woman undergoing a body surgery are starkly carnal and terrible.

Your midriff sags toward your knees;
your breasts lie down in air,
their nipples as uninvolved

as warm starfish (CPS, p. 70).

It seems that Sexton' plain message conveyed to women is that this gradual decay is the natural course of life. Gravity and time will take hold of a body and transform it, and there is no escape. It is as if she is asking the question: why does a woman have to tear off her flesh and place herself in a contraption to have a baby-like skin? To Sexton, these ideologies about beauty and medical techniques to make it everlasting do not make any sense. Therefore, a woman should not have to remain in a doll-like state for beauty and irrationally suffer for the purpose of being accepted by the world and to live up to the image and identity the patriarchal society has carved out for her.

Likewise, Sexton's speaker in her poem, "Self in 1958," lives in a society without a female-defined identity. The poem opens up with a perplexed female speaker asking,

What is reality?
I am a plaster doll; I pose
with eyes that cut open without landfall or nightfall
upon some shellacked and grinning person,
eyes that open, blue, steel, and close.
Am I approximately an I. Magnin transplant? (CPS, p. 155)

Instead of a real woman with blood and flesh and volition to decide her existence, the speaker is rather a "plaster doll" who "poses." The lack of identity and lost self is highlighted by the question, "Am I approximately an I. Magnin transplant?" Magnin & Company was an American fashion and luxury goods store that sells Madame Alexander dolls, a collection of dolls which predates Barbie by several decades and has the typical image of femininity with fancy clothes, perfectly styled hair, large eyes, and a dainty red mouth.

The speaker thus feels like a fake construction, a heartless toy, living an inauthentic existence. It is further illustrated in the second stanza.

I live in a doll's house
with four chairs,
a counterfeit table a flat roof
and a big front door.
Many have come to such a small crossroad.
There is an iron bed,
(Life enlarges, life takes aim)
a cardboard floor,

windows that flash open someone's city,
and little more (CPS, p. 155).

In these lines the poet's life in the outskirt setting is just as the construction and counterfeit as her identity and self, and her home furniture reveals a contrast picture that has a multiplicity of connotations; an "iron bed" and "a cardboard floor." An "iron bed" contrasts with the previous child-like images, and a cardboard floor suggests the fragile structure of woman's life that can give way at any moment. The line that the windows "flash open on someone's city, and little more" enhances the persona's sense of alienation and lack of identity within a society dominated by males; the city is not her city, and she does not belong to it because it is "someone else's city," and beyond that the surroundings have little to offer her. Despite her feelings of alienation, loss and confusion, the painful realization that the statement "Many have come to such a small crossroad" implies that she is aware that there are other women who may feel as she does. This provides no solace and does nothing to lessen her feelings of confinement and subordination. Rather, being conscious that there are possibly other females undergoing the same emotional and psychological trauma like hers, seems to aggravate her despair. They are all suffering alone and no comfort whatsoever will be given.

The speaker's argument of being a toy produced by society for the sake of males' recreation and gratification carries on in the following stanza.

Someone plays with me,
plants me in the all-electric kitchen,
is this what Mrs. Rombauer said?
Someone pretends with me –
I am walled in solid by their noise –
or puts me upon their straight bed.
They think I am me!
Their warmth? Their warmth is not a friend!
They pry my mouth for their cups of gin
And their stale bread (CPS, p. 156).

Metaphorically, someone, maybe a man or a husband, "plays" with her emotions, "plants" her in the kitchen like a mannequin. So, the picture of the traditional roles for women is grim and awesome. Here Sexton, through the image of a doll, portrays the patriarchal exploitation of women and the complete control of their life. The use of action verbs prevalent throughout the poem

enhances the male ideology that women's destiny and identity is at the hand of man. The reference to the "all-electric kitchen" points to a modern house and woman's domestic duties that seems apparently a bliss for her, but in reality, this new technology exacerbates women's plight who has become one of these culinary electric gadgets. The sarcastic reference to "Mrs. Rombauer" brings to mind Irma Rombauer, the author of *The Joy of Cooking*, which was a popular American cookbook since its publication in 1931. This fleeting mention of this domestic female writer adds to the domestic theme in the poem and serves as a symbol for those women who are still deceived by and conform to the orthodoxy of man.

Thus, the speaker does not paint a portrait of domestic felicity. Again, someone plays with her by wearing a mask, by pretending with her, and she is deceitfully imprisoned by being "walled in solid by their noise" and forcibly put "upon their straight bed." This portrayal of her life sounds much more like that of an unwilling, abused captive or an asylum inmate than a happy housewife. However, the shock that "They think I am me!" suggests that the people around her do not consider this condition as strange or unusual, rather it is in compatibility with the patriarchal policy. It is only the speaker who is aware of her existence as a doll, and she suffers from the lack of a reliable identity. The hegemony of man and his over-towering domination over woman's life is enhanced by images such as "puts me upon their straight bed," "Their warmth is not a friend!" and "They pry my mouth." These activities are not welcome in the light of the words being employed. They present a description of a sexual and psychological violation. While bread is commonly considered to be a symbol of nourishment and life, in this poem the bread is stale, and unwholesome. There is no physical, emotional or spiritual comfort whatsoever to be found in this kind of selfish relationship. The employment of symbolism in Sexton’s poetry is very effective as symbolism, according to Mujahid Alwaqaa (2019b), is considered a powerful weapon at the hands of skillful artists.

The unreality of the speaker's life is spotlighted by the frequent repetition of her dilemma in the next stanza.

What is reality
to this synthetic doll
who should smile, who should shift gears,
should spring the doors open in a wholesome disorder,
and have no evidence of ruin or fears?
But I would cry

rooted into the wall that
was once my mother
if I could remember how
and if I have the tears (CPS, p. 156).

The repetition of the word "should" points to expectations placed upon women in this role, who should "smile" and play the happy housewife. The speaker's longing for "the wall that was once my mother" points to the feelings of abandonment and alienation and of being overwhelmingly manipulated by a male community. The concluding lines of the poem end with a note of total despair and the tone is exceedingly mournful as the speaker longs for moments to cry if she only could remember how and if she had the tears. Furthermore, these lines suggest that she has been buried in the housewife role for so long that she does not remember how to show feelings of anguish, suffering and pain, as these emotions are not expected to emanate from a woman whose natural and conventional destiny is within the four walls of a house. Perhaps she simply cannot cry because she has been reduced to a doll, and displaying such emotions are beyond the ability of such a lifeless object. Space, here, represented by house acts as a prison for the female agency instead of a place where she feels a wider identification and empathy with it (Alwaqaa, 2021).

A fragmented self is ubiquitously evident in "Self in 1958," which glaringly portrays an upsetting portrait of a woman who feels excessively disappointed and sees her domestic existence inauthentic and shadow-like. However, this domestic sphere is traditionally recognized as the only reality of women existence. From biographical information about Sexton the reader gets to know that she did often feel stifled by her life as a wife and mother, and this resulted in the identity crisis in her life that culminates in self-destruction. Janice Markey (1988) states that the speaker in this poem stands for "the prototype of the all-American women put forward by the mass media of the period. She, in comparison to the woman in "Her Kind", does not have any sense of identity" (p. 150). Sexton (1985) again divulges her feelings towards the difficulty of leading a life governed by the laws and conventions of patriarchy. She explains this before she commenced in writing poetry. She writes, "I was trying my damnedest to lead a conventional life, for that was how I was brought up, and it was what my husband wanted of me. But one can't build little white picket fences to keep nightmares out" (p. 84). In "self in 1958" her predictable "nightmares" come to the surface, unraveling the tensions, perplexity, and bewilderment which female individuals may undergo and endure within the constrictions of a conventional life that perpetuates the identity plight and the fakeness of women's existence.

Sexton relies on her life and experiences for the themes of her poems. Her experiences incorporate personal as well as mythical memories. The adventures of each of her personae constitute a commentary on the woman's identity plight in this unfair and biased world. She weaves highly personal poems out of her sexual, emotional and even spiritual experiences with integrity and mastery. Her poetry should thematically and stylistically be read in the context of her unique experiences of gender and feminine. As Kamala Das (2013) remarks in the course of an interview, "A writer derives inspiration from his life, what else? A writer is like a mirror that has learnt to retain the image reflected in it. Indelible reflection. Those who do not write, retain nothing of life, ultimately. Life runs through their fingers like fine sand" (p. 57).

Conclusion

Anne Sexton tries to subvert the underlying foundations and ideology of the patriarchal oppositional system by blurring its boundaries and decreasing its gap. To do so is to create new possibilities for constructing a new viable female identity that can be imagined, defined and articulated not in relation to male's interests or patriarchal hierarchy, but on female principles and terms. The possible alternatives are, definitely, based on difference, abundance and changeability. The new female identity can be defined as non-oppositional, non-hierarchal and a different kind of difference. The ultimate goal of the poetry of the feminist poets such as Sexton is to make the opposite sides of modern culture meet. Sexton wants the existing gender contradictions to be totally fused into the crucible of humanity. It is possible to argue that such a strategy, however, utopian, may effectively work towards healing the severe split between genders found in the binary opposition. It provides new creative perspectives for redefining critical concepts such as identity, love, and power through poetic composition.

Some of Sexton's poems have been invested with a personal mythology and are peopled with her different relations, mother, husband, lovers, children, and friends in an attempt to define her self in relation to them. Her personality has become the raw material for her poetry, and she realizes that she is different from other people in terms of vocation. As she believes that the poet's raw material is not stone or clay; it is her personality and language. This belief, which may be applied to every creative writer, reflects the essential component of her poetry and indicates a direction to the understanding of her character. Her poetry is sometimes described as a sort of compulsion-neurosis whose main purport is to offer a kind of release, a safety-valve, for her emotions. However, she views poetry as a means of self-discovery and investigation. She states that as she writes she gets closer and closer to her true self.

Her poems carry the violent energy associated with spontaneous and unreflected emotions. She finds poetry a demanding art. She uses, a personal voice, and self-revelation in an effort to evolve her personality in a self-assertive mood. It is observed that her personae are her own mutilated self, tormented by temporal consciousness of the loss of the self and identity. Thus, in Sexton's poetry, there is an abiding sense of identity crisis which pervades most of her poems as she relentlessly tries to build an identity in a patriarchal society. The existential framework of her poems underlines the dynamics of self-evolution. Her poetry is marked by a feminist consciousness as well as a feminist sense of resistance to male oppression.

The common major characteristic of Sexton's works is the confessional mode of her writing. She is seen as the modern model of the confessional feminist poet who transparently puts her heart naked on paper. Aside from her standard themes of depression, isolation, suicide, and despair; her work also encompasses feminist issues specific to women, such as struggle for identity, oppression by unsympathetic society, abortion, and more broadly adultery before such subjects were commonly addressed in poetic discourse. Currents of sufferings, social injustices and oppression overflow the whole of her poetry. She used her poetry to express the emotional anguish that characterized her life and the life of other women. She suffered several serious emotional and psychological setbacks. She was unable to be a mother and sank deeper into depression attempting suicide many times. Then she finally found an outlet in writing poetry to express the devastation in her life, the cruelty of an unfeeling husband, irresponsible parents and an unfair society at large.

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Golden Saudi Literary Figures: Readings in Mojab Al-Zahrani's Contributions

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Abstract

This study explores the intellectual and literary contributions of Mojab Al-Zahrani (معجب الزهراني), a prominent Saudi literary figure, whose work has significantly shaped modern Arabic criticism and autobiographical literature. By examining his autobiographical novel *Biography of Time: Life of an Individual – Story of a Generation (سيرة وقت)*, the research traces how personal narrative intersects with collective memory, offering deep insights into Saudi Arabia's cultural, educational, and political landscapes. Al-Zahrani's engagement with critical theories such as structuralism, deconstruction, and semiotics reveals a deliberate effort to modernize Arab literary discourse. The analysis highlights how his lived experience as both an insider and outsider—navigating local traditions and global intellectual arenas—creates a rich merging of identity, resistance, and cultural evolution proving the clear contribution to the progress of Saudi literature particularly in one of the most prominent literary genres, the novel. The findings underscore the importance of autobiography as a genre that both documents and comments on the broader socio-political context, positioning Al-Zahrani as a pioneering voice in contemporary Saudi literature.

Keywords: autobiography, golden figures, literary influence, Saudi literary pioneers, Saudi literature, narrative identity, gender studies.

شخصيات أدبية سعودية من ذهب: معجب الزهراني: قراءات في إسهاماته

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الملخص

تحاول هذه الدراسة ان تستكشف الإسهامات الفكرية والأدبية لمعجب الزهراني، أحد الأدباء السعوديين البارزين، الذي أثرت أعماله بشكلٍ كبير في النقد العربي السعودي الحديث وأدب السيرة الذاتية. من خلال دراسة روايته السيرية "سيرة زمن: حياة فرد – قصة جيل"، يتتبع البحث كيفية تداخل السرد الشخصي مع الذاكرة الجماعية، مقدماً رؤى عميقة حول المشهد الثقافي والتعليمي والسياسي في المملكة العربية السعودية في الفترة التي أرادها الكاتب. يكشف انخراط الزهراني في النظريات النقدية كالبنيوية والتفكيكية وعلم الرموز والاشارات عن جهدٍ واعٍ للأخذ بروح العصر في الخطاب الأدبي العربي عموماً والسعودي على وجه الخصوص. وتُبرز هذه الدراسة البحثة، تحليلياً، عن تجربته المعيشية كفردٍ داخل الوطن وخارجه في آنٍ واحد – متنقلاً بين التقاليد المحلية والساحات الفكرية العالمية – وتُنتج مزيجاً ثرياً من الهوية والمقاومة والتطور الثقافي، مما يُثبت إسهامه الواضح في اثراء الأدب السعودي، لا سيما في أحد أبرز الأجناس الأدبية، ألا وهو الرواية. وتؤكد نتائج الدراسة على أهمية السيرة الذاتية كنوع أدبي يوثّق ويعلّق على السياق الاجتماعي والسياسي الأوسع، مما يجعل معجب الزهراني صوتًا رائدًا في الأدب السعودي المعاصر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: السيرة الذاتية، الشخصيات البارزة، التأثير الأدبي، رواد الأدب السعودي، الأدب السعودي، الهوية السردية، دراسات النوع الاجتماعي.

Introduction

Biography remains one of the most important literary genres, as it is the most honest and least affected form of writing. Therefore, it plumbs the depths of the writer's self and reveals unknown areas. However, its importance does not stop at the writer himself, as many autobiographies reveal periods of time, social situations, and events experienced by writers. They present to their readers identity and many worlds overlooked by history. It reminds us with post-colonial theory. At the heart of post-colonial theory is the recognition that colonialism operates as a system not only of territorial control but also of epistemic dominance—shaping truth, identity, and history. "For there is no doubt that imaginative geography and history help the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away. This is no less true of the feelings we often have that we would have been more at home" (Said, 1979, p. 55).

Orientalism is emblematic of how discourse constructs "the Other" in ways that justify and sustain colonial power. This theoretical perspective draws heavily on Michel Foucault's insights about the connection between knowledge and power, showing how colonial regimes produced and imposed a hegemonic narrative that silenced indigenous voices and legitimized domination (Said, 1979). Autobiographies thus transform into a collective history. "I might agree with Al-Muhanna (2020), who opines that the novel as a literary genre is of particular importance, being able to disintegrate and present ideas more comprehensively as well as being one of the broadest and most containing literary genres" (Dahami, 2024). Thus, in the novel by the writer Mojab Al-Zahrani, entitled "Biography of Time: The Life of an Individual - The Story of a Generation, *(سيرة وقت)*" the author's memories flow from his early childhood. Its events unfold like water in the valleys of Al-Baha, south-central Saudi Arabia. In Al-Baha, the writer grew up, and his eyes were opened to the beauty inspired by its picturesque and wonderful nature.

Al-Zahrani's novel *Biography of Time: Life of an Individual – Story of a Generation (سيرة وقت)* is "a long prose narrative portraying imaginary or actual people and events" (Dahami, 2023). It deals with two cultures, the west and orient. Critical terms within post-colonial theory include Orientalism, which denotes the West's constructed, exotic, and often demeaning portrayal of Eastern cultures; hybridity, Homi Bhabha's concept of cultural intermingling; subaltern, to emphasize voices marginalized by dominant discourse; and mimicry, Bhabha's idea of colonial subjects adopting colonizer behaviors in a way that both resembles and resists them (Said, 1979; Bhabha, 1994).

The biography of Mojab Al-Zahrani reminds the literary readers and critics of Post-colonial theory, which refers to an interdisciplinary field of critical thought that examines the cultural, political, and economic legacies and structures left behind by colonial regimes. This theoretical movement emerged most forcefully in the mid-20th century, drawing upon works by thinkers such as Frantz Fanon—who offered profound insights in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) into the psychological and material violence of colonialism—and Edward Said, whose foundational *Orientalism* (1979) explores the West's patronizing representations of "the East." Together, these intellectual contributions laid the groundwork for understanding colonialism not as a historical phenomenon that ended with independence, but as a lingering matrix of power and representation (Fanon, 1963; Said, 1979). Mojab Al-Zahrani might be influenced by such theory for which touches or traces might be found in his narrative by a way or another.

Mojab Al-Zahrani is a Saudi critic and academic. He served as a faculty member at King Saud University and Al Yamamah University. He served as director of the Arab World Institute in Paris for six years. He also served as a member of several scientific and cultural journals (Saudipedia, n.d.). He is a prominent cultural and academic figure who has left a clear mark on the Saudi and Arab literary scene through his efforts in literary criticism, developing cultural dialogue, and promoting cross-cultural communication. He is an important Saudi critic and academic, considered one of the most prominent voices in the cultural and literary arena in Saudi Arabia and the Arab world. Al-Zahrani "made significant contributions to the development of modern Saudi literature" (Dahami, 2025d). Born in Al-Baha in 1954, he received his undergraduate education at King Saud University in Riyadh and then completed his graduate studies at the Sorbonne University in France, where he earned a doctorate in comparative literature.

Mojab Al-Zahrani worked as a lecturer of literature and criticism at King Saud University, supervising numerous university dissertations and contributing to the development of the critical and academic movement in the Kingdom. He also served as Director General of the Arab World Institute in Paris, the first Saudi to hold this prestigious position. "His insightful critiques and commentaries enriched literary discussions, providing new perspectives on storytelling" (Dahami, 2025e). Throughout his career, he contributed to promoting cultural dialogue between the Arab world and the West.

Al-Zahrani is a critic who has played a significant role in modernizing Arab critical discourse, having published numerous books and studies on modern Arabic literature, literary criticism, and

contemporary cultural issues. Among his notable publications is "Convergent Texts: Studies in Literature and Criticism."

He has published two books in French: the first is entitled "Lectures Dialogiciques" and the second is entitled "The Image of the West in the Contemporary Arab Novel." He has also written numerous critical articles published in newspapers and literary magazines and has participated in editing and compiling literary and cultural encyclopedias. In addition to his academic work, Mojab Al-Zahrani has played an active role in the Saudi cultural scene through his participation in seminars and cultural forums. He has received great acclaim from literary and cultural circles both inside and outside the kingdom. He is known for his encouragement of dialogue and cultural openness and his call for renewal in Arab literary thought.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is grounded in a theoretical framework that intertwines literary criticism with autobiography studies. It draws upon theories of narrative identity, which suggest that personal narratives shape individual and collective identities. Al-Zahrani's social narrative embodies a hybrid space between the personal and collective, positioning the autobiography not just as a self-reflection, but also as a socio-political and cultural manuscript. The research applies a notion of the intellectual in two types of migration or travel, one is physical and the other might be called a spiritual. This multi-dimensional approach enables a nuanced reading of his *Biography of Time* as both literary artifact and literary commentary.

The framework also incorporates touches of post-colonial theory to analyze how Al-Zahrani's experiences reflect broader cultural dialogues between the Arab world and the West represented by Al Baha, Riyadh, Paris and other places. Furthermore, the study might refer to feminist theory to explore themes of gender and sacrifice in Al-Zahrani's depiction of women in his life, particularly his mother and stepmother. This multi-faceted approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of the text while situating it within relevant literary and cultural contexts. Also. "Feminists consider gender roles and identity assigned to women are just social constructions contrived by patriarchy to perpetuate their domination and oppression of the female.

So, they try to reinterpret, rename, and reconceptualize the existing culture and theories which are based on patriarchal principles and conceptualization" (Alwaqaa, 2025b). Feminist theory is a critical framework that analyzes gender inequality, patriarchy, and the social, political, and economic roles of women (and other genders). Its roots trace back to the 18th and 19th centuries with early suffragists and liberal feminists, but as a scholarly discipline, it began to coalesce during second-wave feminism in the

1960s and 1970s. Influential figures include Betty Friedan, whose *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) unveiled the dissatisfaction of suburban housewives, and Simone de Beauvoir, whose existentialist treatise *The Second Sex* (1949) famously argued, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." (Friedan, 1963; Beauvoir, 1949).

The Importance of the Research

This research is significant as it sheds light on underrepresented voices within the Saudi literary principle, highlighting Mojab Al-Zahrani's unique contributions at the intersection of modernity**,** tradition, and intellectual resistance**.** Understanding the contributions of Mojab Al-Zahrani is vital for several reasons. Firstly, his works offer a window into the literary and cultural transformations occurring in Saudi Arabia during the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Secondly, Al-Zahrani's integration of modern critical theories, such as structuralism and deconstruction, into the Saudi literary discourse marks a significant shift in how literature is analyzed and appreciated. "Autobiographical literature is viewed as a comprehensive narrative genre encompassing a wide range of writing styles that take the writer's self as their starting point and primary subject" (Dahami, 2025c). This research contributes to the broader field of literary studies by highlighting the role of autobiographical narratives in shaping collective memory and identity within the Arab world. By examining Al-Zahrani's life and works, scholars can gain insights into the socio-political dynamics that influence literary production in contemporary Saudi society.

Research Questions

The paper addresses several key research questions such as how does Mojab Al-Zahrani's autobiographical narrative reflect the cultural and social realities of his time. This question seeks to explore the ways in which Al-Zahrani's personal experiences and memories are intertwined with the broader cultural and social context of Saudi Arabia during his lifetime. It aims to analyze how his narrative captures the essence of the society he grew up in, including its traditions, challenges, and transformations, thereby providing insights into the historical backdrop that shaped his identity and literary voice. Another question is in what ways does Al-Zahrani's work contribute to the evolution of literary progress in Saudi Arabia? This question focuses on Al-Zahrani's impact on the field of literary progress within the Saudi context. It aims to examine how his adoption of modern critical philosophies has influenced the way literature is analyzed and appreciated in Saudi Arabia. It also looks at his role in

promoting cross-cultural dialogue and how his contributions may have challenged traditional literary customs.

In addition to the question, what role does Al-Zahrani's narrative play in bridging the gap between individual experiences and collective history in Saudi literature? This question investigates how Al-Zahrani's personal story serves as a microcosm of the collective experiences shared by many in Saudi society. It aims to explore the relationship between individual narratives and the larger historical and cultural narratives in Saudi Arabia. By doing so, it seeks to understand how personal autobiographies can contribute to a collective memory, offering insights into societal changes and cultural dynamics. Generally, these research questions guide the exploration of Al-Zahrani's work, emphasizing the interconnectedness of personal identity, cultural narratives, and literary evolution in the context of Saudi Arabia. They provide a framework for analyzing how individual stories can resonate with broader societal themes and contribute to the understanding of literary traditions.

Authenticity and Renewal in Literary Criticism

Mojab Al-Zahrani has contributed significantly to the development of Arab literary criticism by adopting modern critical approaches such as structuralism, deconstruction, and semiotics. He is one of the first Saudi critics to seek to introduce these approaches to the local literary scene. His writings were characterized by an effort to transcend traditional methods of literary analysis, focusing on textual dimensions, narrative structure, and the role of culture in shaping the text.

Al-Zahrani wrote dozens of critical articles in leading newspapers and literary magazines. His articles always sparked intellectual debates on issues of literature and culture, such as the question of identity and renewal and the challenges of the modern Arabic text. He also co-edited collective books and encyclopedias and supervised numerous research projects.

Al-Zahrani played a tangible role in enriching the Saudi literary scene, working to transfer international critical experiences to local literature, contributing to the re-evaluation of many prominent Saudi literary figures, and highlighting the relationship between literature and the social and cultural reality in the Kingdom. He also encouraged young voices to innovate and embrace new experiences. His literary and intellectual achievements extended well beyond the confines of the local cultural sphere, placing him among the notable voices in the broader Arab intellectual community. His active participation in prominent Arab and international literary conferences and forums positioned him as a figure deeply engaged with contemporary cultural and critical debates. Whether through keynote addresses, panel discussions, or scholarly dialogues, Al-Zahrani consistently brought to these spaces a unique perspective shaped by his personal history, academic rigor, and cultural awareness. His

contributions enriched these gatherings and further cemented his reputation as a critic whose insights could resonate across linguistic, cultural, and national boundaries.

In addition to his presence at literary conferences, Al-Zahrani played an influential role in specialized academic seminars, where he addressed topics at the intersection of literature, criticism, and cultural studies. His invitations to deliver lectures at various Arab and European universities testified to both the breadth and the depth of his intellectual influence. These engagements allowed him not only to share his critical analyses with diverse audiences but also to engage in meaningful exchanges with scholars, students, and fellow writers. In doing so, he established a cross-cultural intellectual presence that transcended geographical divisions, affirming his role as a bridge between different literary traditions and schools of thought.

The foundations of Al-Zahrani's intellectual journey can be traced back to the humble yet formative environment of his early education in his village, Al-Gharaba. It was here, in the midst of a community benefiting from the state's expansion of modern schooling, that he first encountered structured learning. This educational growth was part of a broader national movement toward modernization, facilitated by the consolidation of security and the steady advancement of development across the country. The establishment of these schools reflected a commitment to extending educational opportunities to rural and previously underserved areas, giving young talents like Al-Zahrani the means to embark on an academic path.

A pivotal moment in his life came at the end of his primary schooling. After completing the sixth grade, Al-Zahrani faced what he would later describe as the beginning of his "exile," when he left the familiarity of Al-Gharaba for a neighboring town in pursuit of further education. This move led him to a larger, two-story school—a setting that not only marked a physical departure from his village but also symbolized his entry into a wider and more diverse intellectual world. This early displacement, though rooted in educational necessity, would shape his worldview and perhaps inform his sensitivity to themes of place, belonging, and cultural transition that would later appear in his writings.

Results and Analysis

Literary Contributions of Mojab Al-Zahrani: "The Biography of Time"

Returning to Childhood After more than half a century, Al-Zahrani remained a bird, soaring in all directions, his childhood growing day by day, until he landed in Paris, the city of jinn and angels, which he sang about in "The Biography of Time," just as he sang about his beautiful village, "Al-Gharaba." Isn't Paris itself the stranger: the city-village, the mother of cities and villages, neither in places nor in non-places? (Al-Zahrani, 2019). The author of "The Biography of Time," recently published by

the Cultural Center for Books, Casablanca-Beirut, was destined to be a stranger, a stranger even in his estrangement. Al-Zahrani continued to soar in all directions, his childhood growing day by day, until he landed in Paris. Wasn't he born and raised in the village of Al-Gharaba? Occasionally, it is attributed to a founding ancestor who appears to have been a Sufi who came from afar and gave birth to it from the heart of his estrangement. Occasionally, it is attributed to a legendary "crow's egg" that hatched the writer's lineage. This version suggests that the founding grandfather may have committed a sin, which caused him to leave his country and wander the earth until he eventually settled in the Green Zone. He found his abode pleasant, and so, says Al-Zahrani, "My grandfather the sheikh had no real identity other than his exile."

In the novel, the writer expresses what he does not do, delegating the initiative to the realms of dreams and imagination. At the beginning of the novel, there is the voice of a narrator who travels, and in his mind, real life is outside, not inside. However, the rest of the text is a journey in the opposite direction, as the event revolves around two characters who meet by chance in France, and memories are activated and ignite in them many sweet and bitter memories related to isolated villages in the high Sarawat Mountains. See more at (Al-Rumaihi, 2012, pp. 88-90).

The Novelist Mojab Al-Zahrani recalls a Salafist, the Egyptian Ahmed Grisha, his university professor, who used to say in class that anyone who violated the principle of sovereignty was an infidel. A biography of a generation, a biography for all times, a biography for all events. As a student and university professor, Al-Zahrani was accused of "secularism," which some people mistakenly understood as anti-religion, even though it was in fact anything but. This secularism, which he had previously learned about through the lessons of his professor at King Saud University, Rashad Al-Khater, a French Revolution enthusiast and later Qatari ambassador, took his own life, like Khalil Hawi, disgusted by the widespread and nationalized Arab misery following Israel's invasion of Beirut in 1982; See (Al-Juwaili, 2019, p. 14).

Hence, Al-Zahrani believes he belongs to a country with deep-rooted traditions of governance and managing differences, which protected him from religious extremists. He says this while recalling the terror experienced by his fellow Arab students in France, who came from countries ruled by the military and whose intelligence services promoted progressive slogans. They feared persecution and physical elimination for a mere passing opinion, a reckless idea, or a young dream that the ruler disliked. What is striking in "Biography of Time" is the author's championing of women. Al-Zahrani was fatherless since childhood.

Even though he lamented and grieved his father's death, he painted a beautiful image of him in his imagination through the news he received from his acquaintances. He also says that he was not motherless because "there is a common proverb that says that a man who is fatherless remains in his mother's arms, and a man who is motherless is thrown onto the dunghill." He has experienced firsthand how women can be transformed into goddesses of sacrifice. The father died, leaving behind a house full of children and two widows: his mother and her co-wife, or rather, her companion and friend, who was widowed before the age of thirty and refused to remarry. He says of his stepmother, "She is no less competent and chaste than the most serious and noble men" (Al-Juwaili, 2020).

What should be done? You wonder as you read what he says, and the answer quickly comes to you: "The two young women shared the responsibilities spontaneously and very effectively. My mother took on an organizational role that saw her manage the household throughout the day, and occasionally visit the popular markets to sell fruit, clover, barley, and whatever chickens and sheep were available. Her companion took on the hardships of agricultural work, displaying a patience and skill that many would envy. How much I admired her when I later learned that she had refused to marry despite her youth" (Al-Juwaili, 2020). There is no doubt that “Biography of Time – The Story of an Individual and a Generation” is a biography for all times, conveying to us through the biography of its author the dynamics and ebbs and flows that have taken place and continue to take place not only in Saudi Arabia, but also in the Arab world, and perhaps the world, between the forces that pull us towards the past and the forces that push us towards the future.

The writer, Mojab, is a well-educated man who is far removed from regionalism, tribalism, and kinship. He was the one who dared to break those outdated customs that are held dear. He wrote about the centenary of King Abdul-Aziz’s entry into Riyadh. His novel, or autobiography, offers a brief overview despite its extensive content. It is a farm full of ripe fruits, interspersed with weeds and thorns. Like Yahya Amgasim, Mojab Al-Zahrani's “knowledge of their agricultural practices, religious observances, social norms, and interpersonal dynamics lends the novel a powerful ethnographic quality, without ever veering into academic dryness” (Dahami, 2025a). This biography is not merely a recounting of events; rather, it is rich in noble stances and achievements that reflect the writer's spirit and will. Between the lines, one can sense the suffering and frustrations he experienced, which adds depth to his human experience. You do not feel bored while turning the pages; rather, you find yourself drawn to every word written, as the writer's culture continues to grow toward the sky, like trees whose branches extend upward, conveying a sense of freedom and exuberance.

The emotions of the biography vary between joy and sadness, between success and challenges, making each stage of his life hold valuable lessons. Like the apple and pomegranate trees that adorn his farm, each experience expresses the richness and diversity of life, demonstrating how the writer can view the world from a heightened perspective, drawing on all his experiences to create a source of creativity. His autobiography is a journey rich with emotions and lessons, leaving a profound impact on the reader and inviting them to reflect on the meanings of life and its diverse experiences.

The qualitative shift in his life occurred in Riyadh and at King Saud University, specifically in the College of Education, where his horizons began to open, his vision to expand, and his talents to flourish. This was due to the rich and diverse curriculum and the distinguished professors, both knowledgeable and ethical, who engaged him in beautiful and noble competitions and encouraged his academic achievement and independent reading. The best Arab and Western universities attract professors. This is what must happen if we are to raise the standard of our universities, as the strength of a university lies in the quality of its faculty members. With his literary talent, he describes the qualities of a successful professor: "He is the one who awakens in his students the capabilities of a free mind, the desires of creative imagination, and the skills of refined taste, unlike the teacher who strives, memorizes, and imparts knowledge to his students only in a beneficial way" (Al-Saadoun, 2022). From Riyadh, he moved to the Sorbonne in France, where he began learning French in Royan, in the far southwest of France, and met students from various Arab countries. He spoke about the Sorbonne University and its outstanding professors.

He read Abdullah Laroui and admired his precise and elegant language, including his book "The Crisis of Arab Intellectuals," which became a primary reference for his doctoral dissertation. He contributed greatly to every place he visited, including his proposal to establish the "Ghazi Al-Gosaibi Chair for Cultural Studies" at Al Yamamah University, which contracted with him after he retired from King Saud University. The idea was welcomed by its Chairman of the Board of Directors, Khalid Al-Khudair, and was subsequently implemented.

"The Biography of Time" by Mojab Al-Zahrani: The Life of an Individual is the story of a generation. The novel "Biography of Time," the cultural center of the book, leaves readers and critics enamored with classifications perplexed as to which genre to place it in. Is it a biography of a group that an individual embodies and carries on his shoulders, as its title suggests, or an autobiography? Or does it transcend that into a genre of writing in which epic and tragedy intermingle, contradictions coalesce, and in which humor and biting sarcasm, which elicit a smile and laughter, are reconciled in a single scene with existential anxiety. (Al-Zahrani, 2019)

In Al-Zahrani's biography, there is no distance separating the past from the present, particularly between the village of strangers in the southwestern center of Saudi Arabia and Paris, where the reader discovers all the oddities. Time and place have no meaning outside the author's framework, in which memories flow from the depths of childhood, where he grew up and whose eyes were opened to its sights. The natural beauty of the region is not limited to its picturesque fields, hills, and towering mountains but also extends to the beauty of its life, its simplicity, spontaneity, and tolerance. This region has always been preserved in the memory of its son, Mojab Al-Zahrani, and preserved in his imagination for decades before penning it into his biography.

The author asserts that "the religiosity of nature remained, until the 1980s, a daily practice that did not transcend life… The culture of our entire village appears to be 'spontaneously secular' at its core, because it is a system of worldly values and ideas linked primarily to productive work. Here, religion becomes like oxygen in the air, breathed by people without feeling its heavy authoritarian presence, as will happen later" (Al-Zahrani, 2019). You might think that even though the man categorizes himself as a progressive and belongs to the living and dead Arab writers and thinkers of modernity, whom he read avidly as a student and whom he knew closely or later formed close friendships with, such as Tayeb Salih, Gamal al-Ghitani, Al-Taher, and many other thinkers, critics, and researchers, he always rejected partisanship and isolation within a group that counts his breaths and thoughts.

It might be read in his biography his acknowledgment of the historic and pivotal role played by King Abdulaziz, whom he describes as the last of the finest knights in the entire Arabian Peninsula, in creating a national entity and a centralized state that united vast regions, geographically and culturally distant, under one banner. He also praises Allah for belonging to a monarchy with deep-rooted traditions of governance differences, which protected it from religious extremists. "The borderline engagements of cultural difference may as often be consensual as conflictual; they may confound our definitions of tradition and modernity; realign the customary boundaries between the private and the public, high and low; and challenge normative expectations of development and progress" (Bhabha, 1994, p 2).

What is striking about "A Biography of Time" is that everything it contains, whether a sentence or a passage, contains profound opinions and expressive daily scenes. The author was able to paint vivid pictures of his childhood in his village while also recounting his experiences during his many travels, particularly in France. What distinguishes this book is its bold expression and the honesty of its flowing emotions, giving the reader a sense of transparency and revelation.

The author does not hesitate to confront the culture of death; rather, he calls for a celebration of life, where a smile never leaves his face. Through his style, he draws you in to laugh with him despite

the pain and suffering, creating a beautiful balance between joy and sadness. The author's ability to convey his personal experiences in a lively manner makes "The Biography of Time" a unique experience. Knowing that a biography "is a long text, and its language is often straightforward. What it seeks is to tell a story, portray characters, and manage dialogue to convey a vision, position, or idea. Such an endeavor does not require metaphorical, symbolic, or condensed language" (Dahami, 2025b). Therefore, the narrative demonstrates the art of living each moment to the utmost, leveraging each experience to cultivate a deeper and more understanding person. It is an invitation to reflect on life's issues and how laughter can be a refuge even in the darkest of circumstances. "The Biography of Time" is an inspiring text that highlights the beauties of life despite its challenges and encourages the reader to view the world from a positive perspective, sensing the beauty of the rich experiences that shape our lives.

The author lived a real-life experience that led him to a profound understanding of how women become machines of sacrifice. After his father's death, he left behind a house full of widows: his mother and her co-wife, whom he called his aunt. This woman, who lost her husband while still in the prime of her youth, embodies the suffering of women who bear the burdens of life alone. This experience presents a painful picture of how women can bear heavy responsibilities, causing them to sacrifice their own happiness and comfort for the sake of others. In telling his story, the author highlights how these widows, despite their suffering, continue to face life with courage, reflecting the strength of the human spirit. This dynamic within family relationships demonstrates how the social environment can impose certain roles on women, sometimes burdening them beyond their capacity.

Through this narrative, the author sheds light on the social issues facing women and underscores the need to recognize their sacrifices and their place in society. It is likely to reveal that Mojab Al-Zahrani "is conscious of the complex situation of a creatively inclined woman who strives to change the … social order" (Alwaqaa, 2025a). In short, this text is an invitation to reflect on the role of women in the family and society and how they can become a symbol of sacrifice under harsh circumstances. Through this experience, the author highlights the importance of recognizing women's strength and ability to face challenges, giving voice to their experiences in the face of difficulties. He also says, "In various societal institutions, including schools and universities, and even in some families afflicted by a strict father or brother, I have been forced to the point of deviating from all rational and moral standards. This is because the home has become strictly divided between men and women, and there is no meeting between the two worlds, even at mealtimes, as I have seen firsthand in most of our families, both resident and immigrant! (Al-Zahrani, 2019).

It was expected that the period of silence and contemplation that Mojab Al-Zahrani chose since the publication of his first novel, "Dance" (2015), would result in a second narrative work. The first novel, with all its aesthetics, was based on the biography of another; it indirectly employed the biography of a public figure. Its setting was a village in the Al-Baha region, a city in the French countryside, and European and Arab capitals, and it dealt with a historical era replete with major political, religious, and social changes and transformations. The novelist was mindful that he was taking a risk by telling the story of a real-life hero, who tried hard to prove to the reader that he was fictional. As usual, the novelist surprises visitors and patrons at the Casablanca Book Fair with his second novel, "Biography of Time, Life of an Individual, Tale of a Generation." Since the work had not yet arrived in the Kingdom, we asked its author to reveal some of the story behind the text, which he said began by chance.

Discussion

A Biography of a Time is a biography for all times. It is neither the purely classical autobiography we are accustomed to nor the historical and anthropological chronicle with its stereotypical analytical, reportorial language. It reveals what has been hidden from the reader about Saudi society—and often Arab society in general—and the political, intellectual, and cultural dynamism and flux that rage within it, which entice further research and exploration. Mojab Al-Zahrani is a Salafi but at odds with the Salafism he encountered as a student and university professor in its various forms. Here, the author recalls one of his university professors who stripped off in class to show them the marks of torture on his body in prison, declaring that anyone who violated the principle of sovereignty was an infidel and should be renounced! The author was fed up with these people. They monitored his every move as a student and then as a professor, threatening him and accusing him of Westernization and secularism. He first encountered this "secularism" in the lessons taught by his professor at King Saud University, who was a French Revolution enthusiast and later became an ambassador to Qatar.

Findings

The analysis reveals that Mojab Al-Zahrani's autobiographical work is rich with themes of personal struggle, cultural identity, and social commentary. The narrative intricately weaves together memories of Al-Baha’s natural beauty with the complexities of his upbringing and academic journey. Al-Zahrani's depiction of his mother and stepmother highlights the sacrifices women make within traditional frameworks, highlighting their resilience and strength. Furthermore, the paper finds that Al-Zahrani's innovative approaches to literary progress have significantly broadened contemporary Saudi literature, promoting a dialogue that transcends regional boundaries.

The analysis reveals several key findings

Al-Zahrani's *Biography of Time* transcends personal storytelling, becoming a mirror of generational experiences, particularly for Saudis navigating the complexities of modernity. His geographical journey from Al-Baha to Paris reflects an inner journey of identity formation and intellectual independence, echoing themes of migration found in second half of the twentieth century world literature. Al-Zahrani's embrace of semiotic and structuralism approaches introduced new critical vocabularies into Saudi discourse, making him a pioneer in Arab literary appreciation. His portrayal of his mother and aunt challenges traditional gender narratives by presenting women as pillars of resilience and agents of cultural continuity.

Conclusion

Mojab Al-Zahrani's autobiography is more than just a narrative of the life of a prominent academic. It is an intellectual and human document worthy of careful reading and celebration by researchers, students, and university professors alike. This is because the text Al-Zahrani wrote is imbued with a spirit of honesty, presenting himself as he is, without embellishment or concealment of weaknesses or moments of failure. This honesty is what gives the biography its impact and makes it a moral and educational reference in an age when personal narratives tend toward gloss and exaggeration. The rare courage that characterized his biography is evident in his boldness to confront the truth, whether it relates to himself or his community and academic environment. He did not hesitate to address sensitive issues or criticize practices he saw as impeding scientific and intellectual development. This makes his biography a model of writing that transcends flattery to fulfill its enlightening role. This intellectual courage represents a living lesson that a true intellectual is not content with accumulating knowledge but rather bears the responsibility of saying what he deems right, even if it goes against the grain.

On the other hand, this biography holds rich lessons and morals for students and university professors. One of the most energetic points Al-Zahrani displays "is morality or morals" (Dahami, 2019). It reveals the importance of perseverance in facing academic and life challenges. It highlights the value of openness to other cultures and makes personal experience a field for drawing lessons related to creativity, research, and professional ethics. Students find in it an incentive to overcome obstacles, and professors find in it a mirror for evaluating their professional and academic path. The importance of reading and celebrating this biography also lies in its human dimension. It is not merely a record of professional successes. Rather, it is a comprehensive human story that demonstrates how a person can forge their own path through knowledge, determination, and commitment to values, without losing their critical sense or their ability to empathize with others.

Mojab Al-Zahrani's "Biography of Time" serves as a vital contribution to both autobiographical literature and the Saudi literary scene. Through his reflections and contemplations on personal and collective experiences, Al-Zahrani not only chronicles his life but also invites readers to engage with the broader cultural and social narratives of the Arab world. His work accentuates the importance of recognizing individual stories as fundamental to understanding collective history, ultimately enriching the discourse surrounding Saudi literature and cultural identity.

Recommendations

Future research could expand on the themes presented in this paper by exploring comparative studies between Mojab Al-Zahrani's works and those of other contemporary Saudi writers. Examining the reception of Al-Zahrani's literary contributions within the broader context of Saudi literary movements could yield valuable insights. Scholars might also investigate the impact of globalization on Saudi literature, particularly how Al-Zahrani's works engage with international literary trends. Furthermore, a closer analysis of his analyses of common norms and values could provide a deeper understanding of the literary and cultural changing aspects at play in his narratives.

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Contents

Introduction to the journal .....

Editorial Board of AWJHSS Journal for Humanities and Social Sciences .....

Contents of Vol. 1, Issue 1, September 2025

Washback in English Language Writing Skills: The Impact of Language Assessment on Teaching and Learning 124-144

Habeeb Faddal Ahmed

Investigating Saudi EFL Students' Spelling Errors at Tertiary Level: A Case Study, Al-Baha University, College of Arts & Humanities 145-163

Abdulgalil Abdallah Salih

Gender Roles and Identity Crisis in the Poetry of Anne Sexton, a Modern American Poet 164-191

Mujahid Ahmed Mohammed Alwaqaa

Golden Saudi Literary Figures: Readings in Mojab Al-Zahrani's Contributions 192-209

Yahya Saleh Hasan Dahami

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